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Strategic Striving

Text: Colossians 1:24-29

 Being a believer is hard work!

That sounds like a heretical statement because our work, our effort, should not even be part of our testimony. We are to celebrate Ephesians 2:8-9: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Being a believer is a resting in the grace of God, not the works of a human. That’s what we’ve been taught. Yet, Paul, when writing to the believers in Colosse, says he labors, toils, struggles, and agonizes toward a specific end. That troubles me. Either we are resting in the grace of God in Christ *or* we are working out our salvation.

There might be at least two postures in the Christian faith, both of which could be taken to extremes.

1. Resting in grace through faith, not of works. *Jesus Paid It All is* the theme song of this posture. God does all the work and the believer need do nothing.
2. I must strive, agonize, labor, and make ministry happen. “If it is to be, it’s up to me”.

Both postures, by themselves, would be caricatures of the faith into which we are called. Verse 28 of our text says that Paul preaches, Paul warns, and Paul teaches. That is, Paul is *doing* something. Cf. Paul’s and Epaphras‘ agony in Colossians 2:1; 4:12.

Ministry, at its best, is a partnership between the God of grace and the believers in whom God is at work. We not only *rest* in God. We also *work*, in God’s name!

Our best work is done, not so much *for God* as *with God* (**1 Corinthians 3:4-9, esp. 9)**

Colossians 1:29, NIV:

*To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.*

Colossians 1:29, AMP

*For this I labor [unto weariness], striving with all the superhuman energy which He so mightily enkindles and works within me.*

Paul’s ministry stance is very strategic. He rejects the exclusivity which marked the false teachers of his day. The heretical teachers taught that true spirituality was elitist and complex and only a few would be able to achieve it. Paul, conversely says that his goal, his strategy, is to present the claims of Jesus to “every person”. Paul uses that “every person” phrase, three times in verse 28.

Paul strives, agonizes, works, struggles,,,strategically. So ought we. Let us work as if we, with our human limitations, are responsible for the advancement of the gospel of Jesus. Let us trust God as if that advancement is completely in the hands of God, with no human component.

Then, let us enjoy the partnership that exists between us and the God who saves and calls.

To this end, let us labor.

Amen