

**Text:** Colossians 1:24

**Title:** Ministerial Suffering...For You

**Truth:** Christian suffering benefits the church.

**Date/Location:** Sunday September 6, 2015 at FBC

## Introduction

The apostle has focused on the greatness of Jesus Christ in all that He is and has done in the world. The capstone of his case for Christ's supremacy is that Christ reconciled all things to God through the blood of the cross.

Then his attention turned to the subjects of that reconciliation—in particular the Colossian Christians.

And now Paul is going to shift his focus again, this time onto the ministry that God gave him to make sure that people know the gospel and are matured in Christ. That general idea will take up the remainder of chapter 1. We examine the first verse which focuses on the fact that...

## I. The Apostle Paul Suffered for the Gospel

- A. Paul was in an exalted place, as a minister of the gospel proclaimed to every creature under heaven—a messenger of a message that proclaims reconciliation to all of creation and eternal hope for the saved.
- B. But he has to live in the here and *now* of a sinful earth, not just the *then* of a perfect heaven. He was in prison, as we read in the latter part of the book of Acts. His first imprisonment was under better conditions than his second, but nonetheless his freedom was severely curtailed while he wrote Colossians.
- C. Throughout his missionary career, he suffered many things, as we see in 2 Cor. 11:23-28. This was God's plan for Paul (Acts 9:16).

## II. The Apostle Paul Rejoiced in Sufferings

- A. He what? He rejoiced! Even more than that, he desired to share in Christ's sufferings (Philippians 3:10). The apostles before Paul rejoiced to suffer for Christ (Acts 5:41). We are told to do the same (1 Peter 4:12-14).
  - B. How can he rejoice? 2 Corinthians 4 shows Paul's attitude, knowing what comes from suffering and the end to which we are called.
- 2 Corinthians 4:15 propels us to the next point which is that...

### III. Paul's Suffering Was For the Benefit of the Christians

*"I now rejoice in my sufferings **for you**, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, **for the sake of His body, which is the church...**"*

#### A. In Colossae — "For you"

1. It was for their benefit in that his ministry efforts were the cause of his imprisonment. Those efforts were the very ones that brought the saving gospel of Jesus Christ to the people in Colossae, through Paul's ministry at Ephesus. That is a definite benefit.
2. His suffering could serve to embolden their faith, as in Philippians 1:14. Note that these Christians were made bolder by the chains of a brother. Instead of having fear in their hearts, which could easily have been the case, these preachers were invigorated in opposition to what the government was doing to Paul.

#### B. Everywhere — "For the sake of His body, which is the church."

Paul's prison-causing ministry continued in the writing of epistles inspired by God for the local church of Colossae and the church throughout the world and world history. Paul was paying a price, and the return he got for his payment consisted of the souls of men throughout future centuries.

### IV. Paul's Suffering Filled up the Afflictions of Christ

*"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and **fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church...**"*

- A. These afflictions are not the same as substitutionary suffering nor are they added to Christ's work. Those are finished and there is no lack of them to fill up (John 19:30). But Christ did suffer affliction in his earthly ministry. Examples.
- B. Because the people of the world cannot "get at" Christ since He is in Heaven, His afflictions are transferred to His followers. That is, the world "gets at" us so as to "get at" Him indirectly. See John 15:20 and Acts 9:4. If Christ were here on the earth, he would be suffering more persecution at the hands of wicked men. Since he is not here, Christians take his place in bearing persecution.
- C. The one experiencing affliction for the gospel is by those sufferings identified with Christ in a solidarity that shows the strength of the connection between the person and Christ. The solidarity is also

connected to Christ's body, the church around the region and really around the world.

1. This is true of Clerk Kim Davis in jail during these days. She is identified with the people of Rowan County Kentucky, those who elected her at least, because they are also symbolically placed in jail by an arrogant judge. She is identified with fellow Christians, and we should be able to identify with her. If I understand her profession to be by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ like ours, then she is also therefore identified with Jesus Christ himself. We feel solidarity with her as if we are bound with her same chains. Hebrews 13:3.
  2. This is true of Christian brothers and sisters throughout the Middle East who are suffering because a demonic radicalism is sweeping over the land.
  3. 1 Cor. 12:26 teaches us that if one part of the body suffers, the whole thing suffers with it.
- D. Some other verses that address sharing in the afflictions of Christ are 1 Thess. 3:3, 2 Cor. 1:5, 4:10, 2 Timothy 1:8, 2:8-10.
- E. The idea of "filling up" His sufferings is an interesting one. It brings to mind a gauge where "F" means that the ordained measurement of suffering of God's people is filled or completed. Martyrs of past ages have had to wait until that measure is complete (Revelation 6:9-11). When it is totally filled, Christ will put an end to all suffering. The word has the idea of taking one's turn to fill up something. Paul saw himself in his place in church history as taking his turn in filling up the sufferings of Christ. Others over the years have done the same, like the apostle James, Peter, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Huss and Wycliffe and Luther, Cranmer, and Jim Elliot and his co-workers Saint, McCully, Fleming, and Youderian.

## **Application/Conclusion**

- A. There may soon come a time when we are called to suffer for the gospel. What we have experienced up to mid-2015 is not suffering. But two months ago gay marriage was officially accepted by the highest court of the land, and now already, just 60-odd days later, the first Christian is in jail because of that issue. I have to wonder what will happen in another couple of months, or years. As society continues its headlong rush down the tubes of substituting wrong for right (Isaiah 5:20), we are getting closer and closer to persecution of the church in a country, paradoxically, that was founded in order to escape such persecution. The Devil is a very clever strategist, isn't he?

- B. We need to prepare our minds to be able to rejoice in the sufferings that we will experience, knowing that
1. They can form our own character;
  2. They identify us with Christ and His church;
  3. They may in fact help the church by emboldening it or purifying it;
  4. And those sufferings are “our turn” to fill up the afflictions of Christ that are lacking until He comes.

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