

“COMPLETING CHRIST’S SUFFERINGS”

COLOSSIANS 1:24

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INTRODUCTION

On the cross, after completing the payment for our sins as our substitute and providing for our forgiveness and salvation, Christ cried out, “It is finished!” (Jn. 19:30). **See Hebrews 10:11-14**. His work is complete; nothing needs to be added. Even here in Colossians Paul has made clear that Christ’s work of redemption and reconciliation has been accomplished—He is sufficient, no one’s help is needed (1:19-22; 2:15).

However, Col. 1:24 has been used as a proof-text by the Roman Catholic Church and others to teach that Christ’s sufferings are not complete nor totally adequate for our salvation, but that they must be supplemented by the good deeds of the saints, whose good works can become overflowing so as to provide additional grace and spiritual help to those believers who call upon them. In fact, the entire system of **Indulgences** was built around this verse.

But we must distinguish between Christ’s mediatorial sufferings that are unique and cannot be repeated and his ministerial sufferings that can be imitated and followed by his people—see e.g. Phil.3:10; Col. 1:5-6. When His redemptive sufferings are in view, Paul uses such terms as **cross, death, blood** to express that. He uses no such terms here. Rather, Paul speaks of the Church as His body, of which He is the head and therefore a controlling leader and provider. **Therefore, when a believer suffers, Christ is with him, guiding him, supplying his needs, AND IN SOME SENSE SUFFERING WITH HIM!**

YOU MUST FILL UP WHAT IS LACKING IN THE AFFLICTIONS OF CHRIST.

- I. THE NATURE OF THE SUFFERINGS
 - A. The Servant is not greater than his master—if they called Jesus Beelzebub, what will they do to the servants (Jn. 13:16; Mt. 10:24-25; Jn. 15:20—they persecuted me, they will persecute you; II Tim. 3:12).
 - B. God was satisfied with Christ’s sufferings, but the enemies of the cross “*were not satisfied*.” “They hated Jesus with insatiable hatred, and wanted to add to his afflictions.
 - C. But it is appropriate to note the inferences in the passage to the sufferings connected with “the last days”—a period inaugurated with Christ’s First Coming and continuing until His Second Coming. The NT shows that God has predetermined the length and the severity of such sufferings to be endured by God’s people (see Rev. 6:9-11).
 - D. Therefore, what “is lacking” and needs to “be filled up” are the tribulations that are inevitable and necessary as God’s kingdom faces the opposition of the ‘dominion of darkness’ (cf. v. 13). If Paul had been thinking of Christ’s redemptive sufferings then surely he would have used, as elsewhere, terms such as “his cross,” “his death,” etc. (e.g. 1:20; Eph. 2:16; 1:22; Rom. 5:10; Heb. 2:14). “Afflictions” nowhere else in the NT apply to Christ’s sufferings, and would not be used by Paul of His sacrificial death.
 - E. Due to the mystical union that has taken place between Christ and his church consisting of believers in Him who have now become identified with Christ, Christ even in the present suffers with Paul (and other believers); cf. Is. 63:9—“In all their affliction, He was afflicted.” The Head suffers in all His members. The apostle’s sufferings were those of Christ, for Christ is identified with all His people. Mt. 25 shows that Christ is either honored or rejected when His people are so treated. The personal sufferings of Jesus are over, but His sufferings in His people still continue. They are still defective; for much remains to be endured in this world.

II. THE ATTITUDE DURING THE SUFFERINGS

- A. Paul rejoices in his sufferings; he is not bitter or angry.
- Continually—present tense
 - “Now”
- B. Paul is able to rejoice even in the midst of his sufferings due to Christ’s supremacy and His calling and appointing him to such a ministry—v. 23b; v. 25
- C. Such rejoicing is not a new situation for Paul:
- Acts 16:25—Paul and Silas singing hymns at midnight in the jail at Philippi.
 - II Cor. 11:16-33—Paul “boasts”, rejoices, in all of his sufferings for Christ.
 - Rom. 5:3—“We exult in our tribulations” (same noun uses in this verse).
 - Phil. 2:17-18—Paul rejoices over his sacrificial sufferings on behalf of Christians.
- D. We may at times hear evidence of the clanging of Paul’s Roman chains, but we never hear Paul complain about his sufferings for Christ. Compare other NT evidence of joy in suffering: Mt. 5:12; Acts 5:41; Hebrews 10:34. Paul’s attitude in suffering is nothing like that of the ascetics who tortured themselves in order to gain merit with God.
- E. We are privileged to suffer for Christ: Phil. 2:29-30—“For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake”—having the same conflict as seen in Paul.

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE SUFFERINGS

- A. For the benefit of the Colossian Christians—for the benefit of the local church (“For you—your sake”)
- In Paul’s case, a church where he had never been, and people he had never met.
 - Suffering for Christ is not to be selfish! Not for our own good and benefit.
 - Paul suffered so that souls might be saved, grow to Christian perfection, and be translated to glory to receive their inheritance.
 - The preposition *anti* as part of the double compound verb rendered “fill up” bridges the gap between the “filling up” and the “coming short”. Paul fills up “with something which meets the exigence, or is equivalent to the want”. What Paul uses to “fill in” is not something not related to the defect, but involved sufferings that “met the deficiency, in quality and amount” (E. p. 89).
- B. For the entire Body—the Church (see at 1:18)
- Note the implied contrast of Paul’s “flesh” with Christ’s “body.”
 - “Of the afflictions” likely has the idea “with reference to the afflictions of Christ.”
 - “Of Christ” is possessive—the afflictions belonging to Christ.
1. His **body**” (see at 1:18) with reference to the organic union between Christ and the believers on earth who are united with Him by faith and follow His instructions and carry out his program.
 2. “**Church**” as was the case also in 1:18, has a reference not merely to a local assembly; that local assembly in Colossae has already been mentioned. Paul obviously refers now to all the local assemblies, indeed to all the believers who are part of His body through faith in Him and acceptance of His work of atonement—whether Gentile or Jew.

CONCLUSION

You must be willing to suffer for Christ. We are one with Him and other believers, and as we suffer for Christ we “fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.

As we suffer, we must have the right attitude—not anger or bitterness, but **rejoicing**, counting it a privilege.

And we must suffer for the right reason—**for the local church** and for **the entire body of Christ**.

The Christian life is not to be a selfish and self-centered life. IT MUST BE FOCUSED ON CHRIST AND OTHER CHRISTIANS.

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