

The Hope of Glory Colossians 1:24-29 (ESV) bible-sermons.org February 13, 2011

We've had a fantastic introduction to Jesus. Paul's beginning defense of the Gospel and counterargument to the false teachers was a declaration of the greatness of Christ and what He had done for the believers. When we see Jesus as He truly is, everything else pales in comparison. The glitter of the false teacher's secret wisdom faded into insignificance when compared to the brilliant glory of Jesus.

Paul moved into what Jesus has done for them and the calling on his personal life as an Apostle to the Gentiles. ²⁴ *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,* This is a difficult passage to understand when we just look at it on the surface, but understanding Paul's theology it makes perfect sense.

I remember clearly that one of the first missionaries I met in Japan asked me if I understood this verse. He was going through a difficult time and wondered if this verse somehow related to his life. I can't remember my response, but I don't think I really understood the passage at that time.

First, we should not overlook that **Paul considered suffering for the church a reason to rejoice.** (Matthew 5:11-12) He was not in prison for doing anything directly with the Colossian church, so how could he see his suffering as being "for their sake"? It appears that he is speaking of his role as the Apostle to the Gentiles. (Galatians 2:8) It was indirectly because he was winning people like Epaphras who did start the church of the Colossians.

The increasing growth of the Christian church caused the Jews in Roman cities to complain to the authorities that Christianity was not Judaism and was therefore illegal. The only worship allowed other than the Greek and Roman gods and Emperor worship was Judaism. If the Christian church was deemed to be a break from Judaism, it faced the persecution of Rome. Jealous Jewish leaders who saw their worshipers leave the synagogue to follow Jesus as Messiah had the recourse of complaining to Roman public officials. (Acts 18:12-13) This is why Paul was imprisoned, jealousy over converts. (Acts 13:45) He was converting Jews, Romans, and Greeks to a faith that was quickly becoming unacceptable to Rome.

It was Paul's proclamation of the good news of Jesus that brought people to the faith and strengthened the fledgling churches. He is suffering for the body of Christ, the church's sake. But how can he say he is filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions?

First, let's look at what he is not saying. He is not saying that somehow he had to suffer as a co-redeemer, as if his suffering somehow added to what Jesus did on the cross. We know that is not the case because he has written that it was through faith alone in the Son of God that we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Romans 3:21-25) Let's look carefully at the context and at Paul's teaching and we'll see what he is saying.

Commented [Paul1]: Matthew 5:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Commented [Paul2]: Galatians 2:8 (ESV)

⁸ (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles),

Commented [Paul3]: Acts 18:12-13 (ESV)

¹² But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal,
¹³ saying, "This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law."

Commented [Paul4]: Acts 13:45 (ESV)

⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.

Commented [Paul5]: Romans 3:21-25 (ESV)

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—
²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:
²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

In verse 28, Paul gives us the goal of his suffering and labor, to present everyone mature in Christ. As a member of the body of Christ, he is suffering to mature the believers. Christ suffered to redeem us, saving our souls, making us right with God. As a part of the body of Christ, Paul was suffering for his efforts to mature the believers in this life. (2Corinthians 1:5-7)

One is salvation of our soul, a work accomplished through the suffering of Jesus and shedding of His blood. The other is our sanctification, maturing, which is salvation from this evil world. (Galatians 1:4) That's a work that is partly accomplished through the suffering of fellow believers who face the persecution of the world to build up the body of Christ. Of course it is Christ in Paul accomplishing this task.

Paul remembers that when Jesus met him, He was told that when he persecuted the body he was persecuting Jesus. (Acts 9:4) Now he is a part of that body that is being persecuted by others for the sake of building up what he once tried to tear down. His participation with Christ results in Christ's suffering for the sake of believers to overflow into his life.

Let me state it a bit differently to clarify. Jesus died for your sins, to make you right with God. Nothing can add to that work on the cross and His blood shed for you. (Titus 3:5-7) The body of Christ, your fellow believers, allow themselves to suffer to help fellow believers mature and live a sanctified life in the knowledge of God. Those who are called to teach and preach the word could ignore the call and save themselves a lot of heartache and in many places of the world avoid persecution and even death. But in accepting the call, they know they will participate in the sufferings of Christ, not to add to what Christ did for their salvation, but that others might hear the Gospel and mature in the knowledge of God. Jesus died to save you from judgment, but the results of that salvation should be a righteous life. In that sense the pastor/teacher participates in the sufferings of Christ as they are persecuted for teaching the Scriptures. Whatever is loss in their life for the sake of the Gospel, financial, relational, or physical, is filling up the suffering of Christ to see the body mature in Christ.

Here is how the Message translation states the verse. ²⁵ *When I became a servant in this church, I experienced this suffering as a sheer gift, God's way of helping me serve you, laying out the whole truth.* Colossians 1:25 MSG The translator dropped the "sufferings of Christ" phrase but got at the substance of what Paul was conveying.

That missionary in Japan had seen a drop in support and was wondering if the hardship his family was enduring was somehow related to this. I think it does. I think Mac and Jory leaving behind the blessings of the culture they were born in and going to a primitive place for a year to grow in Christ and disciple a few individuals toward maturity was *filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.*

Commented [Paul6]: 2 Corinthians 1:5-7 (ESV)

⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

Commented [Paul7]: Galatians 1:4 (ESV)

⁴ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

Commented [Paul8]: Acts 9:4 (ESV)

⁴ And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Commented [Paul9]: Titus 3:5-7 (ESV)

⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

All the missionaries we sponsor and many of you in your daily lives do the same. We put our own comfort and convenience second to serving the body of Christ and seeing them mature. And Paul says he isn't discouraged about that loss, but rather rejoices! Why? Because He is serving a Master that he loves dearly. (Philippians 3:8-10) He knows he'll reap an eternal reward. (2Corinthians 4:17) He realizes he is doing something of eternal value, participating with Jesus in turning people from darkness to light. Paul has an eternal perspective. He'd rather be in prison chained to a soldier and writing letters to a despised church than sitting as a respected and wealthy leader of the Sanhedrin. He has an eternal perspective! What's your perspective?

He writes that he is suffering for the sake of the church, ²⁵ *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*. We have some nice sounding theological terms, minister and stewardship, but in Greek they are much more humble, something more like an errand boy of who was given a treasure to manage for his master. (Ephesians 3:2) You see, that is why he is suffering. He's carrying out his duty as an errand boy by investing this treasure in service to his Master. The treasure is the Word of God, and his investment is to make it known to others so that it can produce fruit in their lives as well. This is expressed as *making the Word of God fully known*.

There is a famine today for the Word. (Amos 8:11) There are Bibles everywhere, but Bible illiteracy is probably higher than it has ever been in our country. This nation once spoke in Biblical terms and analogies. We commonly used expressions like "thorn in the flesh" or "divine Providence" or "Jacob's ladder". If you do that today, most people won't know what you're talking about. Some that still use Bible terms distort them from their context and no one knows the difference because they never read or thought about the context. People come out of many seminaries today so confused about what the Bible teaches and what is truth that they give up on entering the ministry, and in some cases it is better that they did.

God is calling more people out of secular jobs, people who have been in the Word all their life and have the good sense to use commentaries by people who believe the Word as their preparation material. Now more than ever the Word of God needs to be made fully known. Many clear Bible doctrines are ignored or explained away and few people seem to care.

Just this week I read of the battle over whether or not the Old Testament was Messianic that has gone on since the 1700s. Jesus said it is! Isn't that the proof? If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Psalm 11:3)

We need people who fully know the Word of God and will speak up when it is distorted, when people need to hear what the Word teaches regardless whether they like it or not. If we are shunned or suffer because we proclaim the Word, let us do as the Apostle Paul and rejoice! Amen? Just be sure you fully know the Word you are proclaiming and proclaim it in love. (2Corinthians 4:2)

Commented [Paul10]: Philippians 3:8-10 (ESV)

⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Commented [Paul11]: 2 Corinthians 4:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

Commented [Paul12]: Ephesians 3:2 (ESV)

² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,

Commented [Paul13]: Amos 8:11 (ESV)

¹¹ "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.

Commented [Paul14]: Psalm 11:3 (ESV)

³ if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

Commented [Paul15]: 2 Corinthians 4:2 (ESV)

² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

Paul had a specific treasure within the Word that he was to share. He calls it ²⁶ *the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints*. This is the light that went on (pardon the pun) on the road to Damascus. (Acts 9:3) As a studious Jew, he knew about a coming Messiah. He knew the prophecies, but within the Scriptures he'd gone over a million times was a mystery. He writes that this mystery was now unveiled to the holy people, the ones God had called. That was a term he had applied to the Colossians at the beginning of the letter, but here, I believe it is applied to the Apostles. The next verse spells it out.

²⁷ *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*. The book of Acts tells the story of how the elders and Apostles in Jerusalem came to understand that the Gentiles were being filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 11:18) Jesus' outreach to Gentiles toward the end of His ministry should have been a clue, but they needed to see for themselves that this good news was for all people, just as the prophets had predicted. (Isaiah 11:10) When they realized the Gentiles were filled with the Holy Spirit just as they were, the teachings of Jesus took on an even greater significance. This new covenant that Jesus ushered in was for all who would believe by faith. (Jeremiah 33:31-33) It was the manifestation of the Spirit in the form of spiritual gifts in that first century that convinced them that God was offering entrance into the new covenant to all, irrespective of nationality or status. (Acts 11:15-17) It was just by faith through grace for all who would believe. If the Holy Spirit was in them, they had been sanctified as well and had the same hope and calling on their lives. It was quite a revelation.

"The hope of glory" means the abiding presence of Christ in us. If He lives within us, has taken up residence in us (John 14:23), if we are a part of that new creation we talked about a few weeks ago, then we know we will be with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:4) We can rest assured that when He returns on the clouds in great glory, we will be with Him. We know because of the change in our heart. Our desires have been transformed. We have a love for His Word. We want to know Him! The Holy Spirit vetoes our decisions at times and makes us uncomfortable when we are out of His will. At other times He nudges us in the right direction and affirms our decision and gives us the words to say. Christ in you is the hope of glory! It assures you that you are a part of the new creation.

²⁸ *Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ*. I purchased a book on preaching recently with the title, Him We Proclaim, taken from this verse. The theme of the book is the theme of this verse. Preaching should proclaim Jesus, as He is the theme of the entire Bible. If we preach from any Scripture and don't somehow return to Jesus, we've missed the main thing. He is the One that made the new covenant in His own blood that makes Jew and Gentile one in Him. (Ephesians 2:14-17) We can't share the Gospel without sharing about Jesus.

Commented [Paul16]: Acts 9:3 (ESV)

³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

Commented [Paul17]: Acts 11:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Commented [Paul18]: Isaiah 11:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

Commented [Paul19]: Jeremiah 31:31-33 (ESV)

³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.

³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Commented [Paul20]: Acts 11:15-17 (ESV)

¹⁵ As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning.

¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

Commented [Paul21]: John 14:23 (ESV)

²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Commented [Paul22]: Colossians 3:4 (ESV)

⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Commented [Paul23]: Ephesians 2:14-16 (ESV)

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility

¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,

¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

Paul got a jab in at the Gnostic vernacular when he said they warn everyone with all wisdom. Gnostics thought they had a corner on wisdom, deeper wisdom, or secret wisdom. For them, it was just for the few elites that rose to the top of their ranks. Paul is saying those who proclaim Jesus do so with ALL wisdom.

A quick look back at the chapter shows the conviction that Paul had in the fullness of Christ. Already he has used the word ALL (from the root *pas* πᾶς in Greek) to describe wisdom, pleasing God, good works, power, endurance, things Jesus created, things Jesus sustains, things His blood reconciles, creation effected by the Gospel, and now to the wisdom proclaimed in the Gospel. Paul is emphasizing that Jesus isn't missing anything that they can attain from the false teachers. **We have everything in Jesus! He is our all in all!**

Jesus is all we need to attain spiritual maturity. This is Paul's goal, the focus of his ministry. It is not only to make converts, but as Jesus taught, to make disciples. (Matthew 28:19-20) That is why he hasn't stopped praying for them. He doesn't want them simply to make a declaration, but to be rooted and grounded in the faith, able to share with others as well, and to endure. Jesus called it fruit that remains. (Philippians 1:9-11, John 15:16)

Jesus' parable of the sower is so instructive here. Paul wanted to make sure the seed was not snatched away, and that the roots grow deep, and that the thorns not choke them from fruitfulness. (Matthew 15:4-8) Jesus wants a bride pure and spotless. (Ephesians 5:27) This harkens back to verse 22. We are made pure and spotless by the blood of Jesus, but the goal of the servant is to help the babe in Christ to mature to live outwardly what Jesus has made of him inwardly. In other words, to help them apply the Scriptures to their life so that their relationship with Jesus and their holiness of life might reach its richest state before He returns or calls them home. Maturity is what guards us from false teaching. It keeps us from those "ifs" we talked about last week.

29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. This was what Paul labored at with dynamic energy of the resurrection power of Jesus that was working in Paul. (2Corinthians 4:10) That's why he was writing the letter. That's why it's so rich and we're taking it so slow. Paul gave it all he had, but all he had was supernaturally empowered! If it would help the Colossians mature, it will certainly help us mature!

Are we giving all we've got and letting the resurrection power of Jesus work in us as we encourage other believers, share with seekers, or use our gifts for God's glory? No wonder Paul could say, "Follow me, as I follow Christ." (2Corinthians 11:1) **The power is there, but we need to give it all we've got WITH all the Spirit's energy.** Cooperation is necessary. He won't take us where we refuse to go.

The goal of Paul is the goal of your elders and all mature believers. In proclaiming Christ, in making His Word fully known, we want to see every individual in our

Commented [Paul24]: Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Commented [Paul25]: Philippians 1:9-11 (ESV)

⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Commented [Paul26]: John 15:16 (NIV)

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

Commented [Paul27]: Matthew 13:4-8 (ESV)

⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, ⁶but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Commented [Paul28]: Ephesians 5:27 (ESV)

²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Commented [Paul29]: 2 Corinthians 4:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

Commented [Paul30]: 2 Corinthians 4:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

fellowship mature. We want to know that if you move on from here you will remain steadfast and stable in the Lord. We want to know that whatever doctrines confront you, you know Christ in you is the hope of glory! And if you understand what Paul is saying in this chapter, that ALL that we need is in Jesus, then that is sure to be true of you.

Mature believer, it is our duty to share in the sufferings of Christ to see the body mature. Young believer, feast on God's Word so that you may be equipped to share in that suffering. New believer, find someone that can encourage your faith and direct you in your life in Christ. Unbeliever, without Christ, there is no hope in eternity. Jesus' arms are open to you, inviting you to come home.

Questions

- 1 Why could Paul say he was suffering for their sake?
- 2 How could he fill up the sufferings of Christ?
- 3 Can we participate in the sufferings of Christ? How?
- 4 And what should be our reaction to suffering and sacrifice?
- 5 What is a minister? A steward?
- 6 Are you one? In what way?
- 7 Who are "those who God chose"?
- 8 What is "the hope of glory"?
- 9 What was Paul's goal?
- 10 What are the "All's in this chapter?
- 11 What is the point of all the "all's?