



COLOSSIANS

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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, Colossians 1:24

The words of this verse have been misused by the Roman Catholic Church to indicate that the sufferings of Christ were not all sufficient for our redemption and atonement, and that Christ's people must continue to earn their way into glory. This has nothing to do with what Paul is speaking about here.

He begins with "I now rejoice." The Greek is more abrupt, beginning with the word "now." The word "now" is temporal. He is saying, "I am bound with a chain, and in the midst of this captivity and suffering, I rejoice. This was the case even though he was appointed as an apostle by Christ and was doing that work as an apostle. The sufferings then are a part of that apostleship which is "for you," meaning those in Colossae (and thus us!).

In these sufferings, he states, "and fill up in my flesh what is lacking the the afflictions of Christ." The term, "the afflictions of Christ" is unique to this passage of Scripture and the intent is a fuller explanation of 2 Corinthians 1:5 which said -

"For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ."

The church is destined for suffering, just as it is destined for glory. Paul understood this, and he felt that as much as he suffered there was an abounding of consolation to be found at the same time. Nothing was lacking in the process of suffering. And the consolation which he felt was surety that he possessed the Spirit of God. In knowing this, he was thus comforted because the Spirit is a guarantee of future glory for the believer. Hence, he notes exactly this in Philippians 3:10 -

"...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."

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In “being conformed to His death,” we shall also be raised as He was to eternal life through “the power of the resurrection.” There could be no shame in the suffering if there is the coming glory which that suffering leads to. Understanding this, believers are not to be ashamed of suffering, but instead are instructed to be willing to bear His reproach, knowing that we bear all of the honor and future glory that comes with it.

With this understanding, we can then see that the words, “and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ” mean that suffering is a part of the human experience in a world filled with sin. Paul’s sufferings don’t add to the atonement which Christ alone provided, but they rather are a natural result of what is expected in the church as it takes on the challenge of bringing the gospel to the world. Missionaries have died, or have been tortured, for bringing the message of Christ to pagan lands. In this, they are filling up what is lacking. There is a need to be met (a lack), and they are the ones who are filling that need. This is, as he says, “for the sake of His body, which is the church.” If the message is going to go out as Christ commanded, there will be afflictions associated with it. Were it not so, He would not have told His followers to take up their cross. This continues even now as the message continuously finds those who wish to crush it and persecute those who proclaim it.

The physical body of Christ Jesus suffered for our sake so that we could become a part of the mystical body of Christ, the church. This body continues to suffer until the church is complete. This has nothing to do with atonement or earning our way into glory, but it is the natural result of carrying the message in a world which needs to hear the good news of Christ Jesus.

Life application: Not all will suffer as Paul speaks of here, but for those who do, they are filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of the church. This is not something to be ashamed of, but to glory in. Let us rejoice if we do suffer in the process of sharing the gospel. It means we are a step closer to the day when the church is complete.

...of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, Colossians 1:25

The words, “of which,” are speaking of the church as referred to in the previous verse. Paul states that he has become “a minister according to the stewardship.” In verse 23, he had stated that he was a minister of the gospel. At other times, he states he is a minister of God and of Christ. The gospel is the message of God, that Paul serves, it is the story of Christ, who is his Lord, and the church is His body which receives that message of Christ from God. All are intricately tied together.

Paul’s ministering to the church is, as he says, “according to the stewardship.” The word is *oikonomia*, and it indicates an administration of affairs, such as the stewardship of a household. Paul was selected to be the particular minister according to the administration of

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God's dealings in the world through the church, the body of Christ. As noted, this stewardship is "from God."

God has laid out the plan of the ages, and it is slowly unfolding in the stream of time. At this time, the church is how God is dealing with the affairs of His household. Thus, the church-age is called, "the dispensation of grace." Paul's duties as a minister in this capacity are, as he says, "given to me for you." He is writing to those at Colossae, a gentile church. This letter, along with his other signed letters – all to gentiles – are authoritative for the gentile-led church-age because he is the Apostle to the Gentiles. His commission is noted in Acts 9, and it is a duty which he faithfully executed in order "to fulfill the word of God."

The Greek here indicates "to fill up the word of God." His duties as a minister of God was to teach and to make fully known the word of God to the Gentile world. The salvation, instruction, and growth of the Gentile-led church is the object of his calling and ministry. Further, in his actions, he is also filling up the word of God in the sense that this was prophesied in the Hebrew scriptures. The Gentiles would come to God through the work of Christ, and Paul's efforts are what was now accomplishing that. Those efforts continue on to this day as his letters set the authoritative standard for this dispensation.

Life application: To understand what God is doing in the world through the church, one must refer to Paul's letters. The Lord selected him to give us the authoritative letters of instruction for this dispensation. To ignore Paul will lead one to have a vast gap in proper theology. A complete misunderstanding of what God intends for His church will be the result. Take time each week to read one of Paul's letters. Any can be read in a single day. If one is read each week, they can all be read in 3 months. If you do this always, you will have read them four times in a single year. And that is just one letter a week.