

# Colossians 1:24-27

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*Paul further reflects on his own status as a disciple/apostle of Christ and how that affects his message for the Colossians.*

Paul concluded verse 23 with a reference to himself as a minister of the gospel. He stated in Colossians 1:7 that he was a bond-servant of Jesus. He expands on that here. *Now I rejoice in my sufferings*. At the present time (*now*), Paul is imprisoned. He is experiencing *suffering* for the sake of the gospel. That Paul describes the suffering as plural (*sufferings*) suggests it is more than just the circumstance of being incarcerated. There are spiritual and emotional sufferings as well. Plus, an array of circumstances to be added to the obvious one.

Paul *rejoices* in these. There are many places in Scripture where this idea of rejoicing in suffering is prescribed (see James 1:2-4 and 1 Peter 4:13 for two such examples). Christians are called to *rejoice in sufferings* for two reasons: first, it unites them with Jesus' suffering—and only by uniting with His suffering can we unite with His glory and gain the greatest rewards of the kingdom (Romans 8:17b); second, the world is a kingdom of darkness, and to defy that darkness causes the world to resist. This resistance will cost us something (*sufferings*) while at the same time revealing that our hope, love, and trust is truly placed in a different kingdom, the kingdom of Christ (a cause for *rejoicing*). We should not seek pain for the sake of pain. But when we seek Jesus and pain results, we ought to *rejoice*.

Paul says he is enduring these *sufferings for your sake*. Meaning, the difficulties are not just helpful for Paul, his character, and his reward. They are important for his ability to minister, to model, and to teach the Colossians. This is his calling. He states in 1 Corinthians, “woe is me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16). He also says, “For if I [preach the gospel] voluntarily, I have a reward” (1 Corinthians 9:17). Paul understands what is in his greatest self-interest and is willing to pay a temporary price for a future reward. Paul lives life as an astute investor.

He next says: *and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions*. Jesus suffered rejection even to death, in order to benefit those whom He served and loved. Paul is now enduring the same type of sufferings on behalf of the believers to whom he ministers. In doing this, he is *filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions*. Those who are baptized into the body of Christ are called to walk in His footsteps, and also embrace rejection from the world, the kingdom of darkness, in order to walk in the ways of the kingdom of light.

In Romans, Paul asserts that those who fill up *what is lacking in Christ's afflictions* will partake in the same immense rewards that Jesus received:

“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also

be glorified with Him.”  
(Romans 8:16-17)

In this passage Paul asserts that having God as our inheritance is something we have unconditionally, regardless of what we do. This is because when we are reborn with a new spiritual birth, we are made children of God through what Jesus did, apart from what we do. However, the second part of verse 17 says that we will only be “glorified with Him” if we “suffer with Him.” To gain the greatest rewards requires believers to overcome rejection by the world as Jesus overcame (Revelation 3:21).

The Bible talks about the *church* as The *Body* of Christ. Paul is *doing his share* in suffering in his ministry on behalf of the *church*. He is not suffering from being a robber or swindler. He is suffering because he is telling the truth of the gospel and that is upsetting people who are opposed to the truth.

Paul is serving in his role to minister to believers while here on the earth, and is rejoicing while enduring negative physical consequences. Paul has spoken of having an eternal perspective, working today for rewards in the future. But that occurs through real work in real time. Paul is not waiting to use gifts and opportunities he does not have. He is using the gifts and opportunities he does have. He has chosen a perspective that having the opportunity to do these difficult things is a privilege for which he is grateful.

Suffering is a part of his journey. As Paul documents elsewhere, he went through incredible trials in serving the church (2 Corinthians 11:22-29). What can Paul do *in his flesh* to serve the body and the cause of Christ? He has chosen to lay it down in service for the church. Working diligently. *Sufferings for your sake*, in the sense Paul is talking about, is a sacrifice of real choices made in this physical world. In his use of the term *flesh* here, Paul is likely speaking of his physical person. What he does in his physical body, in physical time. Elsewhere Paul speaks of the *flesh* as being that part of himself that houses sin (Romans 7; Galatians 5).

Paul is laying aside the difficulty experienced in his *flesh*/physical body. He is looking past the pain, which is real. Paul is choosing the way of the Spirit, which is difficult and comes with a price. He is doing this because he desires life, benefit, and treasure that lasts, rather than the passing pleasures of this world that fade away and leave us wanting. He understands that this is the path that is in his true self-interest (1 Corinthians 9:17;24-27).

Paul patiently and joyfully endures the suffering of Jesus *on behalf of His body, which is the church*. Not just for Christ. Not just for Paul Himself. But also for the community of faith made up of believers in Christ. He has done this *in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions*. The Greek word for *afflictions* in this phrase is “*thlipsis*.” It is often translated “tribulations,” “trouble,” “oppression,” or “anguish.” It is, in its way, a synonym for “sufferings.”

Whether or not to participate in what is *lacking in Christ's afflictions* is the choice of each believer. God does not force believers to join in His sufferings (much less to rejoice in them). He invites us to. And He promises immense rewards for those who accept. All believers will be in heaven with Christ. Not all will receive the reward of the inheritance (Colossians 3:23). In order

to enter, to fully participate in The Kingdom of God, each believer must follow *Christ* and enter into His *tribulations*.

In order to fully gain the same great rewards of obedience that Christ gained, believers must join Him in His *sufferings* (Hebrews 2:5-12). To know by faith is an immense opportunity we will have only in this life, for in the next we will be like the angels in knowing by sight.

A refusal to fill up what *is lacking in Christ's afflictions* is a *lacking* on our part. Christ has done His part and we are called to join Him and play our part (in obedience and submission to Him). The deficiency is with us, not with Christ. Jesus is fully adequate. But by refusing to share in His example (to follow *behind* Him) we close ourselves off to the lessons He learned and the glory He gained from His suffering (Philippians 2:5-10).

When we suffer in this world because of our faith, we come to know by faith, which is something the angels marvel at, and long to understand (Ephesians 3:10; 1 Peter 1:12). If we refuse, this opportunity will be gone forever, to our great loss.

By doing his *share* to fill up *what is lacking in Christ's afflictions* in his *flesh*/physical life, Paul is doing what he can to close the gap between the people of God and God Himself. He is bringing the spiritual kingdom of God into the fallen physical world through the obedience of faith. In serving the church, He is serving the body of Christ.

Paul asserts that *Of this church, I was made a minister*. The phrase *of this church* is not included in the original Greek. It was added in translation for clarification. The reason is to emphasize to whom Paul *was made a minister*.

The word for *made*, (Greek “ginomai”), literally means “be” or “become.” Paul is a *minister*, or servant, (*of this church*). He was *made* or appointed to this ministry by Christ Himself (Acts 9:15-16). By being faithful to his calling, he is fulfilling his stewardship, and by doing it willingly he is laying up great reward (1 Corinthians 9:17). Being a minister is not only something he does, it is also something he is. By joining in Christ's suffering, he becomes a partner with Christ's mission in the world.

This happens *according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit*. The word *according* (“kata”) means “down from,” indicating that the *stewardship from God* came from a higher authority. Namely, Christ. The word for *stewardship* (“oikonomia”) can also mean “dispensation.” It refers to the management of a household or household affairs. Paul was given (*bestowed*) this managerial role for the *benefit* of the Colossians. He is their minister, their servant. Listening to him is almost tantamount to listening to Christ—because Paul is serving as His emissary.

All of this is for the *benefit* of the Colossians. This is not about stuffy obligation from a distant, uncaring God. It is the path of enlightened self-interest for the people involved. Paul's ministry is not to lord over them, but rather to serve them by showing them the ways of Christ that lead to their greatest fulfillment and joy. A way that is counter-intuitive and paradoxical relative to the ways of this world. This teaching is intended for their *benefit*.

The purpose of Paul's stewardship in serving the Colossians is stated next: *so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God*. Literally, the Greek says, "to fulfill the word of God." The Greek word translated *so that I might fully carry out* is "pleroo." It means "to fill to the full" or "to cause to abound." Paul's stewardship is to see that every aspect of God's word is proclaimed. This includes the full spectrum, from a new spiritual birth, to growing in maturity in Christ, to reigning with Him in the new earth.

What exactly is *the word of God*? This is what Paul tackles next.

*Word* ("logos" in Greek) is not describing a word in the grammatical sense. It includes what is said, the thought behind it, the implications, etc. It is perhaps best understood as "complete communication". We might even think of the word "philosophy" or "wisdom of understanding" in thinking about the way the "logos" was understood by the Greeks.

The Bible talks about Jesus as *the Word of God*, most notably in the John 1:1 verse below. He is the full manifestation, the absolute communication, of understanding and knowledge. And it is this to which Paul has been charged to proclaim throughout the world:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."  
(John 1:1)

Paul describes the word of God like this: *that is* (meaning "the word of God"), *the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now become manifested to His saints*. Remember this is just a few years after Jesus' ascension, probably 30-40 years. The revelation of Christ as God-become-man, crucified, raised, and ascended is still very new to the world.

Before this age, *the word of God* (the complete communication of who God is) was a *mystery*. It was *hidden from the past ages and generations*. With the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, *the word of God has been manifested*, meaning fully revealed. Unhidden. The Greek word for *manifested* is "phaneroo." It means "to become visible." What was spoken of and prophesied in veiled terms in the Old Testament has now become fully visible and comprehensible.

God has revealed Himself more fully *to His saints*. These are the people *to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles*. The word translated *saints* here just means those who are set apart unto God, and refers to all believers. The *saints* include both Jews (like Paul) as well as Gentiles (like the Colossians).

Paul returns to the idea of benefit (verse 25). *The riches of the glory of this mystery* means the benefit of having the word of God revealed. The word of God (full communication) is Jesus. This was a *mystery* before it was manifested in the world. And the idea of *riches*, of course, means benefit, advantage, or profit.

The *glory* of this mystery, then, is the revelation of it. Exposing what was hidden. The word *glory*, "doxa," means the observation of a thing's essence, what it is. So, *the glory of this mystery*

is a way of saying, “a revealing of this mystery.” Putting this all together, this amazing *mystery* that has been revealed to the *Gentiles*, something they can understand and believe, is a means to immense riches for them. It opens a path to a great *benefit*.

God *willed* (“had a mind”) to expose or *make known the glory of this mystery* (and the *riches* therein) to *the Gentiles*. The Word of God being released into the world now means the truth of who God is belongs not just to the Jews, but *among the Gentiles* as well.

Paul has structured these last couple of verses such that the explicit revelation of what he means by *the word of God* and *the mystery revealed* is indicated at the very end. It *is Christ!* And the reward, the *riches*, is *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. Our hope, all hope, is in the *glory* (revealing the essence) of Christ in how we live. If we live a life of obedience to Christ, allowing the resurrection power of Jesus to flow through our lives into the world around us in service and love, we can share not only the affliction of Christ, but also His *glory*.

This is stated overtly in Revelation, where Jesus addresses the church in Laodicea, whom He describes as “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” These are believers who are disobedient, but Jesus still loves them, as God always loves His children. God will never reject His children, but He does discipline them:

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore, be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”  
(Revelation 3:21).

Our *hope of glory* is to overcome the rejection of the world, as Jesus overcame. There is no way we can do this on our own. But we can do it through Christ in us (Colossians 1:27). Choosing to walk in obedience activates the *Christ* “in us.” This unleashes Jesus’s resurrection power to bring the Kingdom of God to which we belong into the world around us. The power is all there, waiting for us to choose to walk in it, rely upon it, and thereby gain the glory that is in Christ.

We are, after all, created in His image (Genesis 1:27). Humanity, from the very beginning, has been prepared and waiting for this *mystery* to be revealed, so that we might fully walk in the richness of life. Now not only are we created in the image of God, we have God dwelling within us, and can choose to allow His power to transform us, and spill into the world around us. And even though it will be God doing the work, He promises to give us the reward.

### **Biblical Text**

**Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.<sup>25</sup> Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God,<sup>26</sup> that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been**

manifested to His saints, <sup>27</sup> to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.