
Colossians 1:24-29, *Suffering for the Church!*

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: Are you happy when you can suffer for others? Being poured out, used, exhausted—even abused by the church in which you serve? By Christians who connive against you, who take advantage of you? Paul was! He saw it as His service to our Lord! Suffering for the church is like continuing the suffering Christ did for the Church! This is not about being abused; it is about being totally dedicated to serve and not be self-centered or only pursue what suits and pleases us as leaders. God has given us responsibility, and when we lead, we have to take this seriously. Our church leadership responsibility is simple; we are to proclaim Christ's message and be His display case for others to see His Word and Work. This is also an incredible opportunity and privilege as countless others through the millennia would love to have this occasion that many of us squander or misuse or become apathetic about! We should be pleased to tell people about Christ and His message, and do so cheerfully as God cheerfully gave it to us. For the big secret is, Christ, the One, True, God, and Creator of the Universe, lives in us as believers. He is our assurance, hope, and reason for all we are and do. And we, as leaders or not, should be grateful to share in as we display His Glory. So let us learn and grow so we can be better at knowing Him and showing Him as we depend on Christ and His Mighty Work in us—empowering us!

Contexts and Background:

This passage is the display showing us that Christ's Lordship is universal and cosmic, crossing space, time, and thought. He is eternal—always was, and is, and will be! God comes to us as The Sovereign LORD and “pursues” us. He is the giver of unmerited redemption. He has come as an impact to the universe as His redemptive work impacts our hearts and minds. So, He is displayed by our lives as He is displayed in the universe. In context, this passage also tells us that since Christ is the Firstborn of all creation, He must also be so in our spiritual lives and in the leading a church. If Christ is not first in our lives, He won't be so in our boardrooms, and this puts us on shaky ground, bound to crumble! Paul's point is that Christ is Supreme and the head of the universe and the Church, including the one we lead. While many of these Colossians thought they had to placate and solve riddles from angels to receive the clue to the next step of spiritual enlightenment (early Gnosticism), here it is explained: Christ is above all and He is the all in all! In that day, false teaching replaced sound doctrine, just as it has today in some misguided churches whose teachings do nothing but distance and distract people from God, His precepts, and His call (Eph. 1:21-23; 4:15; 5:23).

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Rejoice in what was suffered/rejoice in my sufferings.* Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter and realized that what he has gone through is of worth for the kingdom and Christ's glory (Acts 28:16-30). Christ's suffering for our sins is sufficient; thus, this passage, in context, shows us that Christ's work is sufficient. Whatever we go through, He is there. His presence and grace are sufficient and we can take joy in all circumstances (Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Cor. 7:29; 2 Cor. 4:7-12). There is also theological thought that this may apply to the end times sufferings and tribulations of our personal lives as well as what the Church has come through and will go through in the future (Matt. 24:21-22).
- *In my flesh.* Meaning Christianity is personal. We can trust Jesus Christ as a convicted person trusts his or her lawyer to plead their case in court—except His appeals are perfect and we get off.
- *What is still lacking.* What is missing is the full trust and hold we are to have for Christ. Also, that the Church is not adhering to His call to know Him and model Him. This does not mean something is missing from our redemption or His Work or is deficient in some way; rather it is a call to trust and take hold of Him to make it work for us in our daily lives. Does this mean we need to add to His salvation with our merit or our own sufferings, or as the Catholic Church taught, “The Messiah's Birth Pangs,”

meaning we vicariously partake in His sufferings? Or does it mean that the Church continues the role in some incarnational role of redemption? More accurately, we carry on His work of being His work, displaying and deploying His work, explaining His work, and bringing His work to others. We are not contributing to redemption; we are receiving and explaining it. We can't pay our own way or tuition, or plead our case before the Father. Only Christ can! When we are weak of faith or consumed by fears, doubts, and circumstances, we prove that we are not fully aware of the Total Sufficiency of Christ (Col. 1:14; 2:8-10; 14; 1 Thess. 3:2-4).

- *Christ's afflictions.* Meaning experiencing persecution in Christ's name will benefit His Church and us. The enemies of our Lord are also ours, and our enemies are also His. The Gospel brings hatred for those who loathe truth and conviction. Christ is personal and we can rely on Him because of what He has proven through the creation and by His atoning work and shed blood. This also means when we go through hard times, we can rejoice because our Lord has gone through far worse for us. It should be a joy for us to go through for our Lord what He has done for us—ridicule, disloyalty, disrespect, betrayal, hatred, condescension, the daily toil of life, and physical suffering (John 15:18-24; 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 1:5; 4:8-15; 6:4-10; 11:23-28; 12:9-10; Gal. 6:17; Phil. 1:13, 29-30; Eph. 3:13; 2 Tim. 2:10; James 1:2).
- *Fill up.* For us, Christ is Sufficient and Supreme. What more can we need? Thus, the call is to fill up with Him and not with the ways of the world (Rom. 3:21-26; 2 Cor. 5:17-21)!
- *Stewards.* This was a manager, usually a freed slave or “freedmen,” of a family estate or large household. *Stewardship* refers to managing what God has given, for He is the owner of all things, even those things that have our name on them. We are the managers of His creation and His Church; we are to feed and care for His sheep and teach His full council and Blood (1 Cor. 4:1-2; 9:17; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 4:10; Heb. 13:17).
- *Fulfill the Word of God.* This means to be devoted to and obey God's precepts from His Scriptures. It also means we are called to bring God's Word not only into our lives and the Church, but also into the world—to be His instruments of peace and reconciliation, denoting faithfulness, as in to obey and to fulfill (Acts 20:27; 2 Tim. 4:7).
- *Mystery.* The Greek word *mysterion* means “secret insights” or something that is yet to be revealed or initiated. For us, it is what was formerly hidden, such as the unity of Jew to Gentile to the Church, which is now fully revealed to us by God to understand and to proclaim. In Jewish thought, wisdom referred to the deeper things of God that only a pious, faithful, “spiritually enlightened” person could understand. However, for the Christian, the mystery is made known, thus the purpose of God is made known for us to make known. Yes, much is still unrevealed, not because it is hidden, but because we have not matured so we can understand it. As we grow, we understand much more; Christ is the Light and He gives us the enlightenment so that no secret understanding is available or needed. Some people say this verse teaches a rapture or secret rapture, and this is just nonsense, because *all eyes* will see Him (Psalm 42:7; Matt. 13:11; Rom. 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7-10; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51; Eph. 1:9; 3:3-6, 9; 5:32; 6:19; Col. 1:9, 12, 26-27; 2:2, 18; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 3:9, 16).
- *Hidden.* God's redemptive plan was a mystery, hidden from most who did not dig into the Scriptures, and also from the Gentiles. Now God's plan is in full view; Gentiles and Jews are now united under God. Yet we can still hide God through our own misdirection, political power plays, and pride. God reveals Himself to us by the Work of the Spirit (Gen. 12:1-3; Ezek. 36:25-27; Zech. 9:9-10; John 3:5; Rom. 5:4-5; 8:14, 26-27; Gal. 4:6; 5:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:3; Eph. 3:5-6), but He will allow us to walk in our own ways away from Him by our own volition, our free will (Acts 14:16; Rom. 1:24-32; Eph. 2:12). Don't let this happen to you!
- *Make known/been revealed.* In context, this means to make sure the Word gets out to the Gentiles too (Gen. 12:1-3; Isa. 66:19).

- *Among.* Means that God is in the midst of and within His people, He is personal and knowable (Gen. 41:38; Num. 27:18; 35:34; Dan. 4:8, 18; 5:11, 14; Col. 2:12; 3:4, 16; 1 Pet. 1:11).
- *Christ in you.* Meaning we as Christians have the indwelling of Christ in us now and we have a future glory too! The coming of the Messiah, which was prophesied, has now come and we can partake of Him. And, because of this, we possess astounding riches, opportunities, and blessings (Isa. 42:6; 45:21; 49:6; 52:10; 60:1-3; Psalm 22:27; 65:5; 98:2-3; John 14:23; Rom. 8:11; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1:7, 13-18; 3:8-19; 1 Pet. 1:3-4).
- *Wisdom.* Means accepting the knowledge of what Jesus has taught and then applying it. As human beings, we have the ability to think, comprehend, and ponder information, and then separate the good from the bad. God calls us to think and organize our thoughts not only to better understand His precepts, but also so we can live better and impact others. This is not about being a fat sheep that just consumes knowledge; rather, it is implementing the practice of our faith from that knowledge (Phil 1:6, 27; 2:12-13).
- *Present.* In context, this refers to completing the task or call that we are given (2 Cor. 11:20; Phil. 3:10-13). A leader is to present Christ in His fullness, uncluttered, and in a clear voice of understanding to prepare God's people for life and eternity (Psalm 16:11; 107:09; Isa. 26:3; John 14:21; Gal. 5:16; 22-23; 1 John 1:7-9; 3 John 4). Solid biblical teaching is imperative! A church or pastor who do not teach are totally ineffective in God's sight, and totally missing the point of "Church" (Matt. 4:17; 28:18-20; Eph. 1:3-14; 2:8-9; 1 Cor. 1:18-2:16; 15:1-8).
- *Perfect.* Meaning we are complete in Christ, with a call to build our faith and fruit further so our maturity in Him grows further. This does not add to our salvation; our understanding of Christ grows to be stronger and of better use to us and to those others around us (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:10-20; Col. 2:2; 1 John 2:6; 3:2).
- *Labor/Strive.* This is a Greek athletic term meaning to *compete in and then complete the competition faithfully*. Paul uses this term to mean that divine empowerment is within us; we have the Spirit's enabling as we work out our faith and strive, even agonize for Christian living (Jer. 12:5; Matt. 28:20; Luke 11:13; John 14:17; Acts 1:8; 4:3; 10:45; 19:1-2; Rom. 8:1-11; 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 15:10, 58; Gal. 5:13-26, Eph. 3:16-17; Heb. 13:5-6; Rev. 3:20)!

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

Fear Not! Why? Because our dependence and life are in Christ! When Christ is living in us and working through us, we can have confidence in what lies ahead of us. Our place in eternity is not just a destination to take comfort in; in addition, it is our motivation to live the Christian life worthily, glorifying Christ. He is our living Hope (1 Pet. 1:3)! When He is our hope and motivation, all we do in life is affected and synergized by His love and fruit. How we think comes from what we believe, and that affects what we do. If Christ is our all in all, then all parts of our life become transformed and renewed (Rom. 12)! Subsequently, we will see our responsibility to care for His church properly and faithfully. His message will be pronounced and proclaimed through us with power, conviction, and in clarity and truth. People will be challenged and revival will break out. We have the privilege to know and proclaim what was once a secret, things that the Patriarchs and Prophets could only dream of. Now we can boldly tell others, both in lifestyle and in words, and with confidence. It is about His riches and His glory! For the ultimate secret, what is foolishness to those who are not in Him, is that the God of the universe is living in us, employing us, empowering us, and loving us. He is our assurance, so let us share this great joy and never let it be a secret! We are called to share His glory and Truth! Do this with warmth, kindness, and in truth. Give to others what we have been given!

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What do you tend to do when Christians scheme or plot against you or take advantage of you?
2. How are you encouraged that Jesus “pursues” you to give you His undeserved salvation?
3. Why and how can you better deal with harsh treatment from others? How can you use this for God’s glory? What is the balance between serving the Lord and taking the heat, between being exhausted versus being abused by the church you serve?
4. Why was Paul pleased to be abused and to suffer for Christ’s sake? He, being in prison falsely and the recipient of great persecution, saw it as His service to our Lord! How does this encourage and equip you?
5. What does it take for most Christians to be totally dedicated to service and not be self-centered or given to pursuit of self-interests in ministry or in church? What about you?
6. What does it mean to you that Christ is in you? How is He is your assurance, hope, and reason?
7. How do you feel that God has given you responsibility? What do you think that responsibility is? What are you going to do about it? How can you take this more seriously?
8. If church leadership is so simple, why are so few actually proclaiming Christ’s message truthfully or being a good display case for Him?
9. How is serving Christ with difficulty and/or cost to us also an incredible opportunity and privilege? How and why would people who say they serve Christ squander or misuse or become apathetic about serving Him? How can this be rationalized?
10. How pleased are you to tell people about Christ? How does His message come from you cheerfully? How can you be more willing and able to give it out?
11. What can you do to depend upon Christ and His Mighty Work more? How does it help that He is also empowering you?
12. What can your pastor or church leadership do to help people be more dedicated to serve for Christ’s sake and not for self-centered pursuits?