

Colossians 1:24–2:5 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, 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, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. 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. ²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

^{2:1} For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, ² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Colossians 1:24-2:5 | Paul's Sufferings

In our movement through Colossians we have seen Paul's writing move from an initial prayer of thanksgiving, to an overflow of praise for who Christ is, then an explanation of what Christ has done for the Colossians. Today Paul shifts the focus to his own life and ministry. Remember the whole purpose of his writing to this young church is to help them mature in Christ, and there is no way to do that impersonally. Ministry is always personal. This is the heart of so much of ministry's joys and hardships. This pattern of how the gospel spreads personally is evident in the fact that Christ made himself personal to us. So when Paul shares Christ, he must also share himself, and because of what Christ has done in and for Paul, when Paul shares himself he shares Christ.

Today we see that Paul rejoices in his sufferings, because he knows they help him accomplish his goal of bearing witness to Christ. Then Paul shows the Colossians how knowing his sufferings for the gospel serve to build them up to know Christ more. And that is his whole goal that the church, even us, might know Christ more.

1. Paul's Sufferings

Colossians 1:24 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,

Have you ever rejoiced in your sufferings? This strange phrase only makes sense if we understand them to be effective. We can all bear incredible suffering if we think it is accomplishing something. My son is really into Legos, he builds and takes apart and

rebuilds and refines. Often times he experiences intense frustration, and missing pieces, and dead end ideas. A large portion of suffering which could simply be avoided by walking away from the Legos. But there is a sense in which he rejoices in that suffering because he knows it will accomplish his favorite thing, a racecar. But much of our suffering doesn't feel like it is accomplishing anything, it just hurts. Sometimes the racecar just doesn't happen.

But Paul sees that his own sufferings even when they appear fruitless are accomplishing something almost unthinkable, they are filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Remember Paul is writing this letter under house arrest. Unable to visit or witness in person, this type of suffering seems precisely counter to Christ's call on his life, and yet he says that it is actually filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. What does that mean? Were Christ's afflictions lacking? Well, not in there ability to accomplish our salvation, or to defeat death, or to secure his righteousness as our own. But for the sake of the Colossians, they aren't present. Paul's sufferings make them present.¹

And this makes sense particularly when we consider this language that Paul uses reaffirming the church as Christ's body. Paul is a part of the church, so he sees himself as just a small portion of Christ's suffering, which in his body the church will be effective for accomplishing Christ's purposes because we both have the Spirit of Christ.

To be a Christian is to be guaranteed a share of Christ's suffering. This is not born for ourselves, nor does it gain us any merit before the Lord because all that was needed for life and salvation was accomplished by Christ alone. But it means that all of our suffering when participated in by faith in the gospel, can be rejoiced in as we participate in the sufferings of Christ, which means they always accomplish Christ's purposes. Always.

Colossians 1:27 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.

Outside of Christ life is hopeless. But Paul bears this suffering in hope. A hope which breaks through for the gentiles and is summed up in Christ. If Christ conquered death, then hope in him is unshakeable. Paul knows this because he was given this message from the Lord himself while he was persecuting the church, but Paul's life was transformed by this grace.

¹ 2 Corinthians 11:9 "And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need."

Paul describes his time with he Corinthians in which the Macedonian church supplied his need. They sent brothers to where Paul was, in Corinth, to give him what he needed financially. Paul is saying his suffering for the gospel is working in the same way, it is making present the suffering of Christ.

Colossians 1:28-29 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.
 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Here we see a mission statement for Paul's life. He proclaims Christ as Lord and savior. He warns of the death that awaits for those outside of Christ, and he teaches everyone who Christ is so that he might present everyone mature in Christ. This is the purpose of this letter and the purpose of Paul's life so he shares his life.

2. Our Benefit

Colossians 2:1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face,

Paul has not met the church in Laodicea or the Church in Colossae but he is deeply committed to their knowing his struggle. Particularly as they are gentile churches and Paul is an apostle primarily to the gentiles. And here he shares that the thing he wants them to know about him is the depth of his struggle on their behalf. But this isn't like Paul is obsessed with his own autobiography, its because he knows that Christ will use his suffering for the betterment of the Colossians.

Colossians 2:2-3 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

What does Paul's suffering have to do with me? There is a flow of thought here, in which Paul understands that knowing his suffering will encourage the hearts of the church, and will bind us together in love. And in being knit together in love we might reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding Christ. Paul's aim is always our knowing Christ.

Our suffering for the gospel encourages one another. This builds our love for one another. And don't you see in our church we experience full assurance of understanding Christ. Assurance is not something you experience alone.

Here is one of the best things you can do to love your church. Rejoice in your suffering for the gospel, and bring others in your church into it. Last week I was experience intense anxiety in the mornings. And I called my friend Ryan and we talked through life and the changes and how we can be pursuing Christ in the midst of this. And I left loving Jesus more. Share your heart and share Christ.