

EXPOSITORY TEACHING ON THE LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE EIGHT: THE SUPREME MINISTRY OF PAUL – PART TWO

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 1:24-29 to 2:1-5

- ❖ “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, 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, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. 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. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”

2:1-5: “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, 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, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. 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.”

INTRODUCTION:

We have looked at:

- “The Supremacy of Christ.”
- “The Supreme Work of Christ.”
- “The Supreme Responsibility of Believers.”
- But now, we will see, “The Supreme Ministry of Paul.

3. TO PRESENT BELIEVERS MATURE IN CHRIST, PAUL SUFFERED FOR THE CHURCH

Paul: Once the persecutor of church now suffers for church. Observe Paul's suffering in the following Scriptures:

- ❖ **Acts 8:3,** “But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.”
- ❖ **Colossians 1:24-25,** “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, *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.” (cf. Eph. 3:13; Gal. 4:19)

Paul confesses as a servant (Grk. *diakonos*) of the gospel and also of the church. In the first century *diakonos* was not an honorific title; it is a low profile title used for servants. (See John 2:5)

- **Col. 1:23**, “not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard. . . . of which I, Paul, became a minister.”
- **Col. 1:24**, “in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister...” Paul confessed here as a minister (servant) of church. Church leaders are not only servants of God, but also servants of church.
- ❖ **Colossians 1:29**, “For this I toil (to the point of exhaustion), struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”
- ❖ **Colossians 2:1-5**, “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, 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, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. 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.”

Observations:

- i. Paul *suffered* for the church (for believers). See, “my sufferings for your sake” “for the sake of his body, that is, the church.”
- He suffered for the gospel and also for the church. Much of our suffering is only for ourselves or for our family, not for the gospel, nor for the church. How are we suffering for the church?

Some may suppose this suffering for church is only the work of an apostle or church leaders, not of believers. Observe the following Scripture:

- ❖ **1 John 3:16**, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

David Garland: We live best when we put the purposes of God and the needs of others first, even if it means that it brings danger and distress to our own lives. We handle suffering in our lives best when, in the midst of it, we reach out to help others instead of focusing on our own private pain and anguish. (*The NIV Application Commentary, Colossians & Philemon*, pg. 132)

- ii. Paul *rejoiced in his sufferings*. See, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake.”
 - Not *in spite of* sufferings nor *after going through* sufferings, but Paul rejoiced *in* his sufferings. How? Because his focus was on the welfare of believers. There is no joy in suffering for oneself; there is great joy in suffering for God’s people. Remember, suffering for Christ is suffering for His people.

Sam Storms: If we do not look beyond suffering to the greater spiritual goal that it achieves, it will breed bitterness and resentment rather than joy. If we regard suffering as an end in itself, that is to say, if we fail to take “the long view” and see it in the light of its eternal consequences (cf. 2 Cor. 4:14-16), God will appear cruel and life meaningless.

- iii. Paul labored and suffered for the church, not by his own will and power, but by God’s work and power which powerfully worked within him. See, “For this I toil, struggling with ALL HIS ENERGY that HE POWERFULLY WORKS within me.”
 - **Sam Storms**, “Apart from conscious, consistent, concentrated reliance on the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead, burnout is a sure thing. Paul toiled without losing heart and struggled successfully because he drew deeply from the well of the infinite and unending energy of God!”
 - God’s power and work in us does not prevent us from labor and suffering. In fact, His power and work in us is for the purpose of our laboring and suffering well for His glory.

Tension of the Text: “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.” (**Colossians 1:24**)

Note: Bible scholars point out that the word “afflictions” used in the phrase “Christ’s afflictions” was never used in the New Testament for Christ’s redemptive sufferings.

At the surface level, it seems Christ’s redeeming work on the cross was insufficient, and Paul is filling this lack. This isn’t true. See the following Scriptures:

- ❖ **Col. 1:13-14**, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”
- ❖ **Col. 1:19-20**, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”
- ❖ **Col. 2:13-14**, “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”

How did Paul in his flesh fill up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions?

- Christ suffered as a *propitiator* (turning away God's wrath by offering Himself as a sacrifice) for the sins of people; Paul suffered in the *presentation* of the gospel of Christ through which sinners become saints.
- Christ suffered as a *mediator* to reconcile man to God; Paul suffered for the *maturity* of believers in Christ.
- Christ suffered to *establish* the church; Paul suffered to *equip* the church.

SUMMARY:

1. To Present Believers Mature in Christ, Paul Prayed Unceasingly for Their Maturity.
2. To Present Believers Mature in Christ, Paul Proclaimed Christ, Warning Everyone and Teaching Everyone with All Wisdom.
3. To Present Believers Mature in Christ, Paul Suffered for the Church.