

“Sharing in the Suffering of Christ”
Colossians 1:21-24
(Preached at Trinity, March 18, 2018)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Verse 21** Paul described our former state before we were redeemed in Christ.
Colossians 1:21 NAU - "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds"
2. Paul described several dimensions of our condition.
 - A. We were alienated from God. This describes our condition as the enemies of God. We were separated from the promises of God, void of any right to His blessings. We were under His wrath and condemnation and heading to an eternity of suffering.
 - B. We were hostile in mind – Our entire disposition was at enmity with God. We were in a constant state of warfare.
Romans 8:5-8 NAU - "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, ⁷ because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."
 - C. We were engaged in evil deeds. God had given us over to our corruptions.
Romans 1:28 NAU - "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,"
Ephesians 2:1-3 NAU - "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."
3. Even while we were in this wretched and hopeless condition Jesus Christ came and redeemed us by suffering in our stead.
Colossians 1:19-20 NAU - "it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross"
Colossians 1:22-23 NAU - "He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach-- ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister."

4. After describing the Gospel of reconciliation Paul says at the end of **Verse 23** that he was made a minister of this Gospel. But this has resulted in untold suffering for Paul. In fact, Paul was writing from his Roman imprisonment. It was an imprisonment from which his deliverance was in question.
Philippians 1:20-21 NAU - "Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."
5. As we continue with **Verse 24** Paul begins to describe his pastoral labor for the church. He makes it clear that the sufferings he had endured was for their sake, for the sake of the church. He begins by making a bold statement:
Colossians 1:24 NAU - "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"
6. Paul is saying that by suffering on behalf of the people of Christ he is entering into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.
 Paul describes this fellowship in his letter to the Philippians.
Philippians 3:10-11 NAU - "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."
7. But Paul takes it further in this verse. He raises it up to a higher plain. He declares:
Colossians 1:24 NAU - "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."
8. Is Paul saying that there was something deficient in the suffering of Christ that it was necessary for him to supplement? – "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." NO! May it never be! Paul would never say that. The sacrifice of Christ was infinitely sufficient.
 - A. The writer of Hebrews makes this abundantly clear:
Hebrews 10:12 NAS - "having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God,"
 - B. Jesus spoke from the cross: "It is finished!"
9. Christ's work upon the cross fully accomplished the redemption of His people. There is nothing to be added; nothing can be added. How is it then that Paul claimed his sufferings filled what was lacking in Christ's afflictions.
 - A. First, the redemption of Christ has been accomplished but it must be received.
 - a. The atonement of Christ must be believed. The atonement of Christ will not save you unless you receive it.
John 3:16-18 NAU - "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. ¹⁸ "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."
John 3:36 NAU - "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

- b. The atoning sacrifice of Christ, His suffering upon the cross is the substance of the Gospel. This Gospel must be proclaimed.
Romans 10:13-15 NAS - "Whoever will call upon the name of the LORD will be saved." ¹⁴ How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!"
- c. In this sense, the redemption of Christ must be fulfilled through the preaching of the Gospel. Paul saw his suffering in carrying out this work as sharing in the accomplishing of the work of Christ.
Colossians 1:23 NAU - "if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister."
Colossians 1:28-2:1 NAU - "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. ²⁹ For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."
- B. The other aspect of this fellowship of suffering involves our union with Christ. Every Christian is uniquely united with Christ. Notice in **Verse 24** Paul refers to the church as Christ's body. That which pertains to Him pertains to us. When we are persecuted it is Christ being persecuted. Jesus asked Saul of Tarsus:
Acts 9:4 NAU - "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"
- a. Since God has purposed that the disciples of Christ would suffer it is implied that there is yet remaining of the suffering of Christ.
- b. Ours is in no way a meritorious suffering. It adds nothing to the finished work of Christ, but it is a sharing in the suffering of Christ.
- c. The Roman Catholic doctrine of a treasury of merit apart from Christ makes a mockery of the atonement of Christ. There is no merit in our suffering.
10. Suffering for the sake of the Gospel was not for the Apostles alone. It was not for Paul alone. It is not for pastors alone. It is the condition of every Christian.
Romans 8:16-17 NAU - "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ 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*."
Philippians 1:29 NAU - "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,"
Acts 14:21-22 NAU - "After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

- I. Believers share in the suffering of Christ
- A. Those who share all things with Christ shall also share in His sufferings –
Colossians 1:24 NAU - "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."
1. Suffering is something we share with Christ and all other believers.
 2. Paul wasn't talking about the adversity that he shared with all men in common – suffering that comes from living in this fallen world. He wasn't talking about sickness or accidents. Paul was talking about the suffering that comes from the hands of men as the result of the Gospel
 3. Jesus was heir to the cross, to mocking and scourging.
His disciples shall also share in his suffering.
John 15:18-20 NAU - "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. ¹⁹ "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. ²⁰ "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you . . ."
 4. To follow Christ is to receive all that pertains to Him
Luke 9:23 NAU - "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me."
- B. To be a follower of Christ is to suffer with Him
1. Paul said in **Romans 8:16-17 NAU** - "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ 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*."
Where is the proof that we will be glorified?
It comes through suffering. Suffering is the pathway to glory. We endure persecution, mockery, scorn, and ridicule because of our union with Christ. You can recognize those who are children of God because the world doesn't like them.
 2. Paul referred to the scars from his suffering as the brand of Christ's claim upon his life.
Galatians 6:17 NAU - "From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus."
 3. Jesus said we can rejoice in this
Matthew 5:11-12 NAU - "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹² "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

- II. What is God's purpose in our suffering? Why would He choose to have us suffer in the course of our service to Him? – God works all things for His own glory
- A. This is the great paradox of Christianity
1. The path to life is a path of death
Luke 9:23-24 NAU - "And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. ²⁴ "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."
 2. History is filled with the blood of the martyrs
 Even now in heaven they await the final consummation
Revelation 6:9-11 NAU - "When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; ¹⁰ and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"
¹¹ And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.*"
 3. Martyrdom is the extreme in the suffering of believers. God has blessed America with liberty and peace and martyrdom is not likely. But every Christian faces opposition. There is opposition from evil men and opposition from the forces of Satan.
- B. God sends trials and persecution as a testimony to our conversion
1. It encourages the saints
Colossians 1:24 NAU - "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"
 2. It affirms the Gospel
1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 NAU - "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you"
 3. It affirms our union with Christ
Romans 8:16-17 NAU - "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ 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*."
 F. F. Bruce – "Jesus, the Messiah, had suffered on the cross; now His people, the members of His body, had their quota of affliction to bear, and Paul was eager to absorb as much as possible in his own flesh."¹

¹ Bruce, F.F., *The New International Commentary of the New Testament – The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), Page 83.

4. Peter describes our suffering as a test of our faith
1 Peter 1:6-7 NAU - "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ"
- C. God also sends persecution to humble us and cause us to depend more and more upon Him
- 1 Suffering strengthens us and causes us to mature in our Christian life
1 Peter 5:10 says, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you."
 2. We discover our strength in Christ when we discover our weakness in suffering.
2 Corinthians 12:10 NAU - "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."
 3. God is drawing us ever nearer to Himself. He is conforming us more and more to the likeness of His Son. He is making us holy
 4. God brings us through trials to prove Himself faithful. We learn to trust Him more and more.
- D. Suffering and persecution is a testimony of our righteous life
2 Timothy 3:12 NAU - "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."
1. Note it is not just religious people who will face persecution – it is the godly
Matthew 5:10-11 NAU - "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me."
 2. We must not rejoice if we suffer for taking up some particular cause with great zeal supposing that this is Christianity
 We must never rejoice if we suffer for being arrogant, haughty, mean spirited, self-righteous
 We must demonstrate genuine Biblical Christianity in gentleness and love
- E. God also allows the wicked to persecute us to further their condemnation
Matthew 18:6-7 NAU - "but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. ⁷ "Woe to the world because of *its* stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!"
1. In general, persecution comes from those who hate Christ
 2. Genuine Christianity can expect hatred by the world
1 John 3:13 NAU - "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you."

- a. Humanity is in a constant state of enmity with God
Verse 21 - "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds"
- b. They hate us because we bear the image of God
Christians are a continual reminder of their condemnation
- c. People love religion that doesn't make demands.
Genuine Christianity will be anathematized and declared an abomination.
- e. Carnal religious people will despise those who take Christ seriously.

Conclusion:

1. We must never consider suffering for Christ a strange thing. We live in a Christ hating world. If they hate Him they will hate us.
2. Is it not of great comfort to know that Jesus is mindful when we suffer for His great name? And isn't it a sweet comfort to read that such suffering is actually fellowship in His suffering.
3. May God grant us to live boldly for Christ in this world. And may we consider it an honor if we are called upon to suffer for Him.

John Davenant: "And why should we not regard them as highly honoured who are preferred above others to a participation of Christ's sufferings, as it were to a participation of the royal cup; and who drink of that cup, indeed, of which Christ drank first." ²

² Davenant, John, *Colossians, Geneva Series of Commentaries*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009) page 274.