

An Open Letter to Pastors / Continued V ~

Colossians 1:24 – 29

~ Our Spiritual Safari continues to read the open letter Paul wrote to pastors in this report. If you deign call yourself a pastor – or if you desire to be a pastor at some time – then it is absolutely critical to understand this epistle to the church at Colosse. Rightly dividing this highly doctrinal and deeply theological section of Scripture is a non-negotiable prerequisite for anyone who desires to successfully teach a Sunday school class, conduct a Bible study, or preach from the pulpit – and even for those who simply *speak* of the Lord Jesus Christ. Quite frankly, if you do not completely understand this book of the Bible, then you do not understand God or His Word; it's just that simple. If you have not read our first four reports from Colossians, I suggest you go back and do so now.

Verse twenty-four begins the subjective work of Christ for His saints on the cross. We went over this verse in our last report and, while I do not want to be unnecessarily tedious, it is important to bear down as hard as possible in this chapter – because this amongst the last document Paul penned in this world. This report is going to be blunt and utterly direct, friends. If you do not want to have the reality of the suffering of Christ presented to you, then I suggest you read no further. Of course, anyone fitting that description likely stopped reading these reports a LONG time ago – but I digress. May God bless everyone reading this with acute wisdom, judgment, and spiritual discernment....

24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:

~ A loose translation of verse twenty-four could be, “.... now I, Paul, rejoice in the midst of my sufferings for your sake, and I am completing in my flesh that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ for His body's sake, which is the church.” Paul was suffering greatly in his fleshy body as he wrote this in a dank, depressing, dark, damp, desperate, and dirty Roman Mamertine prison cell – you may be absolutely sure of that. Well, the implication is that

there was something missing from the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that Paul – and all believers – must make up that which is lacking. Now, before you dismiss this teaching out of hand, understand that I realize it seems almost unbelievable that the sufferings of Christ on earth and on the cross were insufficient. However, it was necessary to “*fill up*” that which was lacking to complete the suffering of Christ. Paul says that is exactly what he did! Again, I recognize this is a portion of Scripture not traveled today by religious leaders. The organized church wouldn’t dare speak of or attempt to teach these things.

Also in our last report, we talked about the fulness of Christ. In Christ dwelleth all the fulness – the Pleroma – of the Godhead bodily. Everything in the entire universe is centered in Him. We were told that Christ must have – and does have – the preeminence. All of the sufferings that you and I must bear down here on this earth were shared by Christ – but not the other way around. Jesus understands your pain, hurt, disappointment, loneliness, poverty and desperation; but you and I do not understand His. Yet, even so, it seems there is something left undone that must be done. Paul is saying that, from his prison, he fulfilled those things we are speaking of.

The Lord Jesus told Ananias there were two reasons He was going to use Paul. First, Paul was the chosen vessel to “*bear His Name*” to the Gentiles. Second, Jesus said He was going to show Paul “*what great things he must suffer for My names sake.*” So, at the time in which we are studying, Paul had done all of that. Now, this is a mooted verse, and I hasten to add that these sufferings of Paul were *not* redemptive. There is no merit whatsoever in Paul’s suffering for himself, or for others regarding his salvation. This is only in connection with the furtherance of the Gospel. The word selection by Paul is very precise in all of his writings; and he is always very careful to connect Christ’s redemptive suffering directly with the cross and exclusively with His death on that cross.

Alright, there are *ministerial* sufferings and *mediatorial* sufferings. Mediatorial sufferings are those which Christ did for us on the cross by shedding His blood. We cannot share in those. Making a sharp distinction between the two is imperative. Ministerial sufferings of Christ *can* be

shared — and are to be shared. Mediatorial sufferings cannot be shared; and they include His human suffering as a man, His suffering as the Son of God, His suffering as the sacrifice for the sins of the world – again, we cannot share those, and we will likely never know anything about them. Scripture doesn't mention them in any detail.

Further, when Christ left Heavens glory and came to this earth, He suffered greatly by doing so. It isn't suffering for you and me to become flesh – but for God to stoop to the level of becoming flesh: that's suffering, my beloved. No mortal has ever suffered as Christ suffered. We all have burdens that we must bear alone in this life. We're born alone. We feel pain alone. You and I face certain problems that no one else can understand – even if they wanted to. We all have sorrows and sicknesses that come to our lives which no one else can share, and no one else can go through them for us, or take our place in them.

Then, there are the ministerial sufferings of Christ that we *can* share with Him; and these are what Paul is talking about now. I am only going to mention two of them. First, there is the suffering of Christ for righteousness' sake. In Jesus' hometown of Nazareth, He said, *"now ye seek to kill Me, a Man Who hath told you the truth."* They wanted to kill Jesus simply because He was suffering for righteousness sake! Paul will tell Timothy later in our safari, *".... all who live Godly for Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* My friend, if you are going to live for God, and take a stand for what is right and what is wrong, you're going to suffer; and you will also find out that this world is going to pass you by as quickly as they possibly can. Genuinely Godly men are ignored *wholesale* when earthly honors are distributed. If you are God's man, the world will damn you with faint praise, and praise you with faint damns. That's the way the world treats a true child of God. When athletes, movie stars and politicians are lauded with praise today, God wants to vomit on them. The genuine man of God is not praised – not ever. Paul also said, *".... for Thy sake we are killed all the day long and are counted as sheep for the slaughter."* You will suffer for righteousness sake – make no mistake about that.

Secondly, there is suffering in the measure by which we identify ourselves with Christ for the proclamation of the Gospel. John said, *".... because, as*

He is, so we are in this world.” Jesus said very clearly, *“if this world hate you, ye know that they hath first hated Me.”* If you are of the world, this world will love and adore you, friends. If this world loves you for that which you do in the world, then you are not a child of God – because that would literally be impossible. The world loves its own. The popularity of the Christian with the world is a direct inverse ratio of that person’s popularity with the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are going to be close to Christ, and popular with Him, then you are not going to be welcomed, wanted, or accepted by the world; not in *any* capacity. We are commanded to take our place with Christ. And Christ suffers through His church.

Remember, Jesus asked Saul of Tarsus, *“why persecutest thou Me?”* Saul didn’t think he was persecuting God – he thought he was persecuting Christians. Saul actually thought he was doing God a favor by killing blasphemers of the Mosaic System of Levitical Law. Peter says, *“.... think it not strange concerning the fiery trials that shall try you; but rejoice in as much as ye are partakers of His suffering.”* Jesus suffered tremendously in His human existence. If the Gospel is to go forward today, and if people are going to be saved, then someone is going to have to suffer. Someone is going to have to pay a price; a very high price, indeed! If a child is to be born, a woman will have to travail. The reason this world has so few born again Christians is because there are so few Christians willing to travail. Oh, dear readers, I K-N-O-W this is not popular today; but this is what’s real – and this is what Paul is saying to us in this passage. How much are *YOU* paying today to get the entire Word of God out to the entire world *in sound doctrine*? Anything? Well, I suspect we should move along now....

25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God;

26 Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

28 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

~ So, our Spiritual Safari concludes this leg of our expedition through the entire Word of God with more dispensation. Dispensation is a very good Bible word; and par-excellent theology. If you have any questions about the dispensational economy, or the implied stewardship thereof – feel free to ask. Many people consider dispensation to be a bad word; but those are the people who never study the Bible. I should just briefly add that there are monetary economies, domestic economies, political economies and social economies by which God deals with the world. Even so, dispensation is *ALWAYS* based on the redemptive work Christ did for us on the cross.

Before Christ came into the world and died on the cross, men were required to bring a sacrifice to the temple. That sacrifice spoke of Jesus coming to the world in the future. They brought their sacrifice by faith, too, by the way. The sacrifice didn't save them; they were saved just as anyone else is saved: by the blood He shed at Calvary. The death, burial and resurrection is a historical fact; and is denied only by the most unlearned, wholly ignorant, and dimmest of thinking men. Paul was made a minister by the dispensation of God, friends. That's what Paul said – that's what God said. Many people like to recite the cliché, *"God said it and I believe it and that settles it."* Unfortunately, most of them don't know anything God said. All of this truth regarding the church was hidden from everyone in the Old Testament – but God is sending Paul to the Gentiles now to reveal it to a lost and dying world.

Christ in us is the hope we have today. You and I have a glorious prospect for the future in the church – *IN* the body of believers. The moment we trust Christ, we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and eternal life in His body. The Gospel is not *what* we preach – it is *WHOM* we preach. No man has ever preached the Gospel if they haven't preached the death, burial and resurrection according to the Word of God. That *IS* the Gospel. John said we are to make known this eternal life. John saw eternal life because John saw Christ. Today, you have either accepted Him into your heart, or you do not have Jesus.

If you call yourself a “*pastor*,” there are two things you are to do: one, preach this Gospel to save sinners from the wrath to come; and, two, we are to seek to make men and women faithful members of the local church. I am positive this is why I have the support of some very faithful and honorable men of God throughout this world. This Spiritual Safari is designed to help churches. That should be the one desire of everyone who calls themselves a pastor. If I don’t do these things, then there is no way I would be fulfilling my ministry. I hope this builds someone up to be good and faithful church members who are growing in the grace and knowledge of our Savior and Lord! When that is accomplished, they will absolutely serve God properly, correctly, and completely....

29 Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily ~

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