

Rejoicing in My Sufferings for You

Colossians 1:24

Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you

1. Paul was **suffering** and he was suffering **now** (presently at the time of the writing)
 - a. Suffering:
 - i. Internally: an inward state of affliction; passion;
 - ii. Externally: affliction; calamity;
 - iii. Rom. 8:18 – Paul used this term to describe the sufferings in this present time... suffering in the body... afflictions as a result of life in a cursed earth...
 - b. He was suffering because he was in prison, and writing this letter from prison in Rome.
 - c. In addition to the suffering of confinement, the false teachers would use this fact to ridicule Paul and attempt to discredit him... as a jailbird. (It didn't seem very respectable!) This also was a further attempt of the enemy to make Paul suffer.
 - d. Paul's opposition slandered him because of his imprisonment in order to bring shame and disgrace upon him and his ministry.
 - e. But the very thing the opposition hoped to use to discredit him, Paul used magnify his office!

2. Paul was not ashamed. In fact, he **REJOICED** in his present sufferings.
 - a. Paul was not rejoicing BECAUSE of his sufferings... as if pain and suffering brought him pleasure!
 - i. He was rejoicing **in the midst** of his sufferings.
 - ii. He didn't like suffering any more than you or I would
 - iii. Paul didn't belong to the 700 Club... there was nothing phony about Paul. He didn't PRETEND to enjoy affliction itself.
 - iv. But he did have JOY *in the midst of suffering* – as when he sang hymns in prison, as the blood from the whipping on his back began to dry up...
 - v. James says to count it all joy when we fall into divers trials. But we don't count it all joy BECAUSE of our trials. That is phony.

- vi. Rather, we count it all joy in the midst of our trials, KNOWING that IN THE END... the trying of your faith worketh patience... and God is doing His great work in our heart through it.
- vii. Trials and chastening of all sorts are never fun, but are grievous... but *JOY can be experienced* in the midst of it *KNOWING* the work God is accomplishing through it: fruit unto His glory and honor!
- viii. The deep abiding joy comes from KNOWING the fruitful end... not from the present affliction!
- ix. Paul had earlier prayed that the Colossians would be "strengthened with all might **unto** all patience and longsuffering with JOYFULNESS!"

- b. Paul was suffering in prison, but he wasn't in jail for stealing or refusing to pay his taxes. He was in prison for his faith in Christ.
- c. Suffering as a Christian is nothing to be ashamed about. (**I Peter 4:15-16**).
- d. Paul rejoiced that he was "counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (**Acts 5:41**)
- e. Jesus said, "**BLESSED** are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake. **REJOICE** and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven." (*Matt. 5:10-12*)
- f. This is exactly what Paul was doing: he was suffering for "R" sake... and was rejoicing in it!
- g. The false teachers thought they could *shame Paul* for being in prison. Paul turned the tables on them... and made it clear that he was anything but ashamed.
- h. He counted it an *HONOR to suffer* for Christ... and one day the Lord would reward him for it in glory!
- i. And it is an honor for US to suffer for Christ today too!

3. **For you:** His sufferings were for the Colossians.

- a. He was in prison because of his ministry to the gentiles, like the Colossians...
- b. Eph.3:1 – "For this cause I Paul, the **prisoner** of Jesus Christ **for you** Gentiles."
- c. Acts 22:21-22 – Paul was giving his testimony before the Jewish leaders, and as soon as he mentioned the fact that **God sent him to the Gentiles**, the Jews immediately decided he was worthy of death... and from that point on, Paul was held as a prisoner, and ultimately sent to Rome.

- d. The false teachers hoped to use Paul's imprisonment as a **wedge** between him and the Colossians... but Paul turned it around, and it became a point of endearment between him and the people in Colossae. He was in prison **for them!**
- e. And he wasn't ashamed... nor was he regretting it. Instead, he was rejoicing in his sufferings for them.
- f. Paul was in prison because of his love for the Gentiles and his desire to bring the gospel message to them... that they might be saved and delivered from the bondage of sin and death. That was no cause for shame.
- g. The Colossians understood that kind of love too.

That which is behind of afflictions of Christ

A. The Afflictions of Christ

1. Paul states in this verse, that in some sense, he shared in the afflictions of Christ.
2. The afflictions of Christ mentioned here do NOT refer to Christ's suffering on the cross for the sins of the world. That He did alone. No one has or could share in that.
 - a. **Thilipsis**: a pressing, pressing together, pressure; oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress.
 - b. This term **affliction** is never used of Christ's sufferings on the cross.
 - c. This term is used of **earthly** sufferings in the body.
 - d. It speaks of all the pressures, trials and tribulations of life directed at Christ, the Light of the world, from a world that hates light and loves darkness.
3. **Christ was afflicted in many ways** during His earthly ministry.
 - a. He was afflicted as He saw the **effects of sin** all around Him. (John 11:33-38)
 - b. He was afflicted when He saw **people reject Him** and the life He offered. (Matt. 23:37)
 - c. He **suffered in the flesh** physically, living in a sin cursed earth. He grew tired. He hungered; He thirsted; Christ was just as susceptible to colds, viruses, and sickness as anyone else in a mortal body in a sin cursed world!
 - d. He was afflicted when He saw people **oppose His ministry**. (Mark 8:11-12)

- e. He was afflicted when He **contemplated the cross** and the sins of the world being placed upon Him. (Luke 22:44) Christ suffered as He thought about the suffering that God's will for His life involved.
- f. God's will always involves a degree of suffering – because it means DEATH to self will... absolute surrender to His will.
- g. He was **afflicted for righteousness' sake**. He did good works and men wanted to stone Him. (John 10:31-32)
- h. These are some of the various ways in which Christ suffered affliction during His earthly ministry... as He preached the gospel, radiated the light of God, stood for righteousness, and suffered for it.
- i. We too suffer in similar ways as believers. And as we do, we **FELLOWSHIP in His sufferings**. (Phil. 3:10)

B. That Which is Behind

1. Behind: deficiency, that which is lacking.
2. The term implies that there is **something LACKING in the sufferings of Christ**... that His sufferings we were not quite finished... that there are more sufferings to come.
3. Again, Paul is NOT talking about Christ's suffering **on the cross**.
 - a. Rome uses this passage to teach that Christ's work on the cross was **NOT finished** and that there is some more suffering that WE must endure after death to help provide redemption. They use this passage to justify their false doctrine of purgatory... and claim that the sufferings of Christ on the cross must be supplemented by the merits of Mary and the saints...
 - b. Nothing could be further from the truth. WE can add nothing to Christ's finished work. Our "R" is referred to by God as filthy rags. We have no merit of our own to add.
 - c. Clearly Jesus believed his work on the cross finished the job. He cried out: **It is finished!**
 - d. Clearly the NT speaks of His cross-work as finished:
 - *Heb. 10:10,14* – by ONE offering He perfected forever!
 - *Heb. 9:12* – through His blood shed on the cross, Christ obtained eternal redemption for us!
 - There is **NOTHING lacking** in Christ's work on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins.
4. **But there is something LACKING** in the afflictions of Christ for righteousness' sake... in one sense.

- a. **I Pet. 2:21** - In all of this suffering and affliction, Christ left an **example for us to follow**. He suffered, but He did not strike back.
- b. Christ suffered for "R" sake. And all those who follow Him will also suffer for "R" sake.
- c. **John 15:18-21** – Jesus warned that those who follow Him will suffer persecution and affliction... for HIS names' sake!
- d. Christ suffered for "R" sake while He was on earth, but His life was cut short.
- e. There is MORE suffering to be accomplished for His names' sake.
- f. Those who suffer in a cursed earth as Christ did... are in a sense, experiencing the afflictions of Christ.
- g. They are the SAME kind of sufferings HE endured
 - He was afflicted as He saw the **effects of sin** all around Him. (John 11:33-38) ... AND SO DO WE!
 1. Isn't it painful to watch a loved one ruin his life in sin... when you have the cure, and he won't take it!
 2. Isn't it an awful form of suffering to watch a wayward child be carried away by his sin...
 3. It is an awful form of suffering to watch families disintegrate all around you – and you have the cure, but they won't listen.
 4. It is inward suffering to watch the effects of an awful disease ravage the body of a loved one...
 5. It is suffering of the heart to see a loved one die... and all death is the result of the fact that sin entered the world.
 - He was afflicted when He saw **people reject Him** and the life He offered. (Matt. 23:37)... and so will we.
 1. Christ dedicated His life to preaching the gospel... that others might have life.
 2. He brought the gospel of the Kingdom to Israel, and they rejected it.
 3. That broke His heart... and our hearts are equally broken when we bring the gospel of God's grace to a loved one... and they dismiss it... reject it... scoff at it. That is suffering.
 - He was afflicted when He saw people **oppose His ministry**. (Mark 8:11-12)... and so will we.
 1. Christ experienced opposition to His holy life and to His ministry.

2. Today there are thousands who are quietly suffering because of opposition.
 3. Perhaps it comes from an unsaved mate... or unsaved parents...
 4. Most of us have no idea how difficult it is just to get to church for some folks whose family is not saved... and gives them grief every time they try to go to church or read their Bible.
- He was **afflicted for righteousness' sake**. He did good works and men wanted to stone Him. (John 10:31-32)... and so will we.
1. All those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.
 2. The world hates us and our testimony.
 3. We are not persecuted in this country at the end of a gun, but there is a lot of subtle forms of persecution that takes place...
 4. Believers left out of their unsaved family gatherings... believers by passed for a job because they whole office hates their testimony... the constant barrage of jokes and innuendos at the office or the factory...
5. Paul equated his suffering (and by application, our suffering) with the afflictions of Christ.
- a. Again, NOT Christ's suffering on the cross for sin, but His earthly sufferings for "righteousness'" sake... for the cause of righteousness.
 - b. Paul shared in that. He too suffered for righteousness' sake. In fact, he was writing this letter from prison because he was arrested and imprisoned for preaching the gospel and doing God's will.
 - c. That's exactly what Christ was arrested for and ultimately executed for.
 - d. The suffering for righteousness' sake that Paul endured was in KIND the same as the suffering for righteousness that Christ endured.
 - e. **I Pet 4:13** – we are **PARTAKERS** of Christ's sufferings.
 - i. Partakers: koinoneo: to come into communion or fellowship with, to become a sharer, be made a partner;
 - ii. There is a joint-communion or fellowship in suffering between Christ and us! What a thought!

- iii. Our sufferings are really His... and He enters into our sufferings WITH us.
- f. **II Cor. 11:23-29** - Paul knew WELL about the KIND of afflictions Christ endured. He suffered much in his ministry for the Lord.
- g. In fact, EVERY true believer who lives godly will suffer persecution... the same KIND of suffering Christ experienced.
- h. As believers, we ALL suffer the same kind of afflictions as Christ did... though they vary greatly in DEGREE, they are the same in KIND.
- i. He suffered MORE than we will ever suffer... but He left us an example to follow... an example of a life dedicated to "R" and a life willing to suffer for it... without striking back.
- j. He set the example... and expects that we follow that same path.
- k. In other words, **Christ expects that His body continue to live for righteousness & to continue to suffer** for it.
- l. He expects the church to pick up the suffering where Christ left off.
- m. The Head is gone, but the **Body continues to suffer** on earth.
- n. As the Body of Christ continues the work of Christ on earth (preaching the Word and manifesting Christ in the world), it will continue to suffer for it.
- o. Christ's earthly ministry was cut short after 3 years... but there is much more suffering for righteousness to come.
- p. The world has **a lot more hatred** it wants to VENT against Christ. But since He is in heaven, and the world is unable to strike Him, so they strike out at His Body, the church.
- q. As we live for the Lord and manifest Christ, the world will continue to strike out at us... and cause us to suffer... because it CANNOT strike out at Christ.
- r. There is still more suffering to go...

Fill up that which is behind...

A. Fill Up

1. Fill up defined:
 - a. This term appears only here in the NT.
 - b. to fill up in turn; complete;

2. Paul is stating that he was taking his turn in sharing with Christ His afflictions.
 - a. This is a filling up ***in turn***.
 - b. Christ suffered during His earthly life... and all those who follow Him ***stand in line and take their turn*** at suffering.
 - c. The world has a lot more hatred against Christ to vent... and believers are added to the church daily... willingly lining up to take those strikes and to suffer for Christ's names' sake... and this utterly confounds the world!
 - d. Every believer who lives godly SHALL suffer persecution.
 - e. There are no exceptions. It is as if we were all standing in line, ***waiting our turn*** to experience our share of suffering.
 - i. Are you willing to stand in line and wait your turn to suffer for the glory of God?
 - ii. Some of you might be experiencing affliction and suffering in your life right now. You are partaking of Christ's afflictions... fellowshiping with Him in His sufferings. This is cause for joy and rejoicing... IF we understand the END of it all... more like our Savior!
 - iii. For others, you're standing in line... your turn is coming soon!
3. Present active indicative: (fill up) = that Paul may continually be in the process of completing the afflictions of Christ in his flesh.
4. II Cor. 1:5 – the sufferings of Christ abound in us...
5. *Some see in Paul's words the idea that God has a set number of sufferings for His Body to endure... God has a **quota** of suffering ordained for His Body.*
 - a. *It is true that the Lord said to Paul, "for I will show him how great things he **MUST** suffer for my name's sake."*
 - b. *The Lord knew how much suffering Paul would endure... and each of us!*
 - c. *It is as if God is giving the world time now to strike against Christ if they choose... **by striking out at His Body**.*
 - d. *But, that those days will be cut short. God will not allow this to go on forever.*
 - e. *One day He is coming to take His bride to glory... and to judge the world in righteousness.*
 - f. *At that point, the **sufferings will be complete**... nothing behind or lacking any more.*

In my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church.

1. Paul suffered in the flesh.

- a. This means in his body (not the sin nature)
- b. "In my flesh" could refer to that which Paul suffered while in his body: which would include suffering physically, and emotionally... externally and internally. Every form of suffering we experience, we experience in our body.
- c. Gal. 6:17 – Paul bore in his body (flesh) the marks of the Lord Jesus.
 - i. These were physical scars left on his body from the whippings and the beatings that he willingly submitted to for the sake of Christ.
 - ii. While the false teachers wanted to use his imprisonment and scars as displays of disgrace, to Paul, they were badges of honor!
 - iii. He rejoiced to be able to suffer for Christ's Body's sake!
- d. **II Cor. 11:23-28:** and he suffered more than most of the other disciples... certainly more than us!
 - Physically: stripes; prisons; stoned; beaten;
 - Emotionally: perils of waters; perils of robbers; perils of his own countrymen; perils among false brethren; the care of all the churches which came on him daily.
 - His sufferings, like Christ's, were internal, external, physical, mental, and emotional. And through them all, the Lord delivered him.

2. For His Body's sake: What Paul suffered, he suffered FOR the church (hyper – in behalf of the church)

- a. Paul states here that he was suffering in the flesh, and that his suffering was **FOR the church**...
- b. For the benefit of the church, the Body of Christ.
 - i. Paul suffered because he was preaching Christ to the Gentiles... and because his ministry was to establish churches... train believers... teach the truth... and to send others out to do likewise.
 - ii. He committed the truth to faithful men who would in turn commit it to other faithful men.
- c. The world hated this ministry and caused Paul to suffer much for it.

- d. But Paul was **WILLING to suffer**, to endure all kinds of painful experiences, for the benefit of the church! (are you?)
- e. **In carrying out God's Work on earth** (preaching the gospel in the world; ministering in the LC; serving Christ at home) – *there is always suffering involved.*
 - i. We are all called to share in this suffering.
 - ii. Every member of the Body is to carry his own burden... his share of the load of suffering.
 - iii. We all need to be *willing to suffer* for the sake of Christ's Body.
 - iv. There is suffering involved in serving God in the LC.
 - v. There is the collective grief we all share when a **believer falls away** from the Lord...
 - vi. There is the collective suffering we share when someone **stirs up controversy** and trouble in the Body... (over something really important like the colors of the curtains...)
 - vii. There was suffering involved in **putting up this church building...** cuts, black thumbs, sore elbows, cuts, bruises, asthma attacks, a heart attack, and lots of sacrifice of precious time...
 - viii. There is a collective grief we share when we see carnal believers **refusing to grow up...**
 - ix. But mature believers, like Paul, are WILLING to sacrifice and suffer and pour their lives out as a drink offering in the work of the Lord in the LC... and not only so, but to REJOICE in it!
- f. Paul was **WILLING to suffer**... for the benefit of the church!
- g. Paul did not share the ME generation's concept of the church: "What can I **GET OUT** of it?"
- h. Rather, Paul's attitude was, "What can I **POUR INTO** it?"
 - i. Paul decided to pour his whole life into ministering to the Body of Christ... his life was a drink offering poured out in the service of Christ for His Body's sake.
 - ii. **How do YOU view the LC?** What is YOUR concept of the church?
- i. He was willing to suffer to incredible lengths for the sake of the Body. (*II Tim. 2:10 – suffer for the elect's sake*)
 - i. Today we see folks who, are not only unwilling to suffer for the LC, but aren't even willing to get out of bed to come to SS... aren't willing to drag themselves

away from the golf course to gather with the saints for worship... unwilling to get off the couch to come to prayer meeting...

- ii. There are folks who, if someone steps on their toe, or says something unpleasant to them, they are ready to quit the LC... as if their personal pleasure and feelings were more important than the Bride of Christ!
 - iii. Let's admit it: we have a very **shallow concept** of the LC and of its value to God... of how PRECIOUS the LC is to Christ... it's His **bride**!
 - iv. God help us!
 - v. It is through SUFFERING for the benefit of the Body (fellowship in His sufferings) that we **learn experientially** how PRECIOUS the Bride of Christ really is to Christ.
 - vi. The most valuable learning only comes through suffering... through the cross... we fellowship with Christ's sufferings and are **made conformable to His death**... only THEN do we experience the resurrection LIFE of Christ working in us! No suffering, no glory.
3. **Acts 9:4** – When Saul persecuted the church, the Body of Christ, it was equal to **inflicting suffering on Christ Himself**.
- a. Smiting Christ's Body (the church) is like smiting the Head. The way we treat Christ's Body is a reflection of our attitude and treatment of Christ Himself.
 - b. The Body of Christ is on earth... living in a sin-cursed environment... in a hostile environment... shining forth light in the midst of darkness, where the darkness hates the light. The Body suffers for its ministry here... and the world persecutes the body in countless ways.
 - c. **The Head feels everything the Body feels**. When the Body is afflicted, Christ is afflicted. Any attack against the Body is an attack against its Head.
 - d. As the Body suffers on earth, Christ our Head suffers in heaven.
 - e. In a real sense, when any MEMBER of that Body suffers, Christ also suffers...
 - f. And in a real sense, when any member of the Body suffers, ALL the members of the Body suffer with it. This is part of the mystery, glory, & wonder of the Body of Christ.

- g. There is a **CLOSENESS in the relationship** between Christ and His Body that we can only dimly understand.
 - h. **Christ CONTINUES to suffer** as His Body suffers for Him.
 - i. This makes good sense.
 - ii. Christ dwells in His Body. His life is flowing through His Body. He lives and dwells there... and He also suffers there!
 - iii. If you punch me in the stomach, the person living and dwelling in this body feels it.
 - iv. So too with Christ. He lives in His Body and feels it when His Body is mistreated.
 - i. **Phil. 1:29** – it is **GIVEN to us to suffer** for His name.
 - j. The world hates Christ, but since the ascension, they have not been able to vent their hatred against Him.
 - i. Hence, they take it out on His Body, the Church.
 - ii. The suffering the church endures is in reality the afflictions of Christ. It is really meant for Him.
 - k. Paul REJOICED that he – he who considered himself the least of all saints... and the chief of sinners... was counted **worthy** to suffer for Christ and His Body. It was a privilege to him.
4. There is **GLORY to follow** the suffering.
- a. **Rom. 8:17** – if we suffer (and we do!) then we shall also be glorified together.
 - b. A willingness to share in Christ's sufferings on earth is a mark of a true believer. It is not a prerequisite of salvation, but a fruit of salvation. All those who share in His sufferings (true believers) will also share in His glory.
 - c. In fact, the MORE we are willing to **share in His sufferings**, the more rewards in glory we will receive!
 - d. **Phil. 3:10** - This brings us back to the cross... living the crucified life... reckoning self to be DEAD... day by day... and moment by moment. This is the ultimate and ongoing means in which we share in the afflictions of Christ... being made conformable to His death.
 - e. That ongoing attitude of death to self results in the Spirit filled **LIFE of Christ manifested** in and through us... to His honor and glory.

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