



eLesson 005

Text: Colossians 1:24-28

Subject: Sufferings and Warnings

Colossians – Part 3

Paul and Timothy's letter to the Colossians changed at verse 24. At that point, Paul began to write alone. What happened to Timothy? Where did he go? I have no idea. However, I do know that in the next verses we can learn much about Paul's attitude toward his sufferings. He did not reject his sufferings ... he embraced them. Paul wrote, *"I rejoice in my sufferings"* 1:24. How could he do that? A better question is ... can we react in the same way? Over the past several years, I have tried to react to adversity with Paul's words from 1 Thessalonians 5:18, *"In everything give thanks."* I say it. I think about it. I meditate on it. I pray about it. It has never changed my physical circumstances. However, it has often changed my perspective.

Why do we suffer? Many Christians believe that all suffering is outside of the will of God. However, that is not true, 1 Peter 3:17 and 4:19. Suffering can actually help us do His will because it helps us stop sinning, 1 Peter 4:1-2. Suffering can encourage obedience. The Early Church was commanded to take the Gospel to the remotest part of the world, Acts 1:8. However, they stayed in Jerusalem. Therefore, God allowed persecution to enter their lives. It drove them out of Jerusalem and into His will, Acts 8:1. Comparing Acts 1:8 and 8:1 is interesting. Suffering can immunize us against sin. Paul prayed that God would take away his thorn in the flesh. God's answer to Paul was *no* ... to immunize him ... to keep him from sin, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. That last verse, verse 10, shows Paul's heart ... *"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."* Do we react like that today?

Back to Colossians 1:24 ... what did Paul mean, that his own sufferings filled up that which was lacking in the afflictions of Christ? Be assured that nothing was lacking in the suffering of Christ on the cross in relationship to His payment for your sin. A believer is saved by the completed work of Jesus ... plus nothing. His payment for our sin was in full. Then what did Paul mean? The answer is that there is a demonstration to the world through His and our combined suffering. Christ is the head of the Body. We are part of His Body. Our response to suffering can demonstrate the power of the life of Jesus ... see 2 Corinthians 4:7-11. Read those verses several times. Think about them. Then read on through verse 18. Verses 16-18 give us the mature perspective on suffering. Do you feel that way when you suffer? In your suffering, give thanks. Know that you share in the suffering of Jesus. Look to the benefits and rewards. Many Christians want to be as refined silver ... but they reject the furnace of affliction. Do not reject your furnace. Embrace it. Let God do His work in refining you.

Our suffering benefits others. Paul suffered for the benefit of the Colossians and for the whole Church, Colossians 1:24. Paul knew that his ministry was a gift from God. Therefore, he wanted to complete it. His sufferings and struggles were for that purpose. Paul proclaimed the mystery, which is ... Christ in us, the hope of glory, 1:25-27. Paul worked hard, 1:28-29. He admonished

and taught believers. His goal was to present every man complete in Christ. As you teach, remember that teaching is about changing lives. We do not simply teach lessons ... we teach people. A lively, entertaining lesson is not the goal. It might be a good tool ... but it is not the goal. A changed life is the goal. Paul worked hard to change lives. He knew that his only real power came from God and not from himself, 1:29. Often he was weak from his sufferings and struggles. However, Paul knew that his real strength came from God. Notice that the thought of chapter 1 continues into chapter 2. Chapter divisions were not part of the original text of the Bible. They were added later and sometimes can be confusing. In a sense, chapter divisions become commentary on the text.

Why did Paul write all these personal details? Apparently, Paul had not been in Colossae, 2:1. Even though Paul had never seen the Colossians, he wanted his life to be an example to them. Paul wanted them to be encouraged ... to be unified in love ... and to come to a full understanding and knowledge of Christ, 2:1-3. His life added credibility to his words. The force of his life gave force to his words. Paul warned them that persuasive men would try to lead them away from the truth of Christ, 2:4. There were many persuasive teachers and preachers in Paul's day ... just as there are today. Persuasiveness is good, Proverbs 15:2 and 16:23. However, good teaching must be more than persuasive. It must be true. We need to be discerning. Increased knowledge protects us from false persuaders. Paraphrasing Ephesians 4:14 ... *When we have wisdom and knowledge, we are no longer children - tossed about by waves of persuasion, carried about by every wind of doctrine, and deluded by the trickery of men.* We need to be able to judge these things. A clear understanding of Matthew 7:1-6 allows us to do that. That passage denounces hypocritical judging ... but does not forbid honest discernment. Otherwise, how could you recognize the dogs and swine?

The Colossian believers needed protection. They needed to be built up in Christ, 2:5-7. They had received Christ by faith. After that, they needed to walk by faith. Faith and knowledge are not mutually exclusive. Yes, the world's wisdom is foolishness to God, 1 Corinthians 1:18-29 and 3:18-20. However, that does not mean that we should be untaught, unlearned, and ignorant about the Bible. We need good sound teaching and the discipline of regular Bible study. Then we can walk by faith, knowing that we are within the will of God. Persuasive false teaching often creeps into the church. The deceptive philosophies of the world are also a danger, 2:8. The world is constantly trying to squeeze us individually and collectively as the church, into its own mold. That pressure is all around us. Sometimes it is obvious. Other times it is subtle, indirect, or even subliminal. Paul warned against empty and deceptive philosophies that are rooted in the traditions of men and in worldliness. That is a good warning for us today. Too much human tradition and too much worldliness have crept into our Christian lives and into our churches.

Would you be different? Imagine, for just a few moments, that you had lived with Jesus in Judea and Galilee as part of the larger group of disciples that often accompanied Him. You listened to Him teach and saw His miracles. You saw Him face-to-face. You lived with Him and for Him. Then shortly after His death, you were persecuted, rejected, tortured, and martyred for your faith. Imagine that for almost 2,000 years, you have been enjoying heaven ... but this morning you were sent to earth into your exact present life and circumstances. How would you now perceive your sufferings and struggles? How would you study the Bible? Would you witness to your neighbor? How would you teach that new believer or Bible class? Would you stand against the persuasive delusion of false teachers? How would you react to the human traditions and worldly philosophies that invade today's Christianity? Would you be different than you are now? How should you change your daily life? What are you waiting for? Will you make those changes today?

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Study Questions Answers at end of lesson.

1. How did Paul react to his sufferings on a personal basis?
 2. How did Paul see his sufferings as part of the whole church?
 3. What was the hidden mystery that he preached among the Gentiles?
 4. From the end of chapter 1, what was the goal of his teaching?
 5. What was the source of Paul's power?
 6. From the beginning of chapter 2, what was the goal of his teaching?
 7. In today's world and church, knowledge of God's Word protects us from whom and what?
 8. Having been saved by faith, we should walk by what?
 9. We should be captives of whom?
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Personal Reflection

No answers provided for these questions.

1. How do you react to struggles and sufferings? How should you?
2. How will you begin to embrace and rejoice in your sufferings?
3. Can you be refined as silver without the furnace of affliction?
4. Are sufferers and sufferings embraced in today's church? Do you embrace them?
5. What is the goal of those who teach you? What should their goal be?
6. What is the goal of your teaching?
7. What false winds of doctrine about sufferings contradict Paul's teaching?
8. How can you distinguish between those who are persuasive false teachers and those who are persuasive teachers of truth? Can you name some in both categories?
9. Identify some empty philosophies, human traditions, and worldliness that has crept into your (not someone else's) corner of Christianity?
10. You were saved by faith. How should you live by faith?
11. If you had been martyred in the first century of the Church, spent the last almost 2,000 years rejoicing in Heaven, and then been sent into your exact present life and circumstances ... how would you be different in attitude and actions?
12. What is the one most important thing you learned from this section of Colossians?



Answers to Study Questions

1. How did Paul react to his sufferings on a personal basis? He rejoiced in His sufferings ... giving thanks in all things.
2. How did Paul see his sufferings as part of the whole church? Paul saw himself as part of the Body of Christ suffering with its Head Jesus. He saw his sufferings as an opportunity to demonstrate the eternal resurrected life of Jesus in him (2 Corinthians 4:7-18).
3. What was the hidden mystery that he preached among the Gentiles? The Gospel ... Christ in you, the hope of glory ... Christ Himself.
4. From the end of chapter 1, what was the goal of his teaching? To present every man complete in Christ.
5. What was the source of Paul's power? Paul labored with great personal effort, and at great personal cost, in his ministry ... but his power was from God.
6. From the beginning of chapter 2, what were the goals of his teaching? To encourage the believers ... to increase their understanding ... so that no one might persuasively delude them or take them captive through false teaching.
7. In today's world and church, knowledge of His Word protects us from whom and what? From being deluded by persuasive false teachers ... and from being taken captive by false teaching of philosophy, empty deception, human traditions, and worldly principles.
8. Having been saved by faith, we should walk by what? By faith.
9. We should be captives of whom? Of Christ.

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