***Suffering

Colossians 1:24-29

COL-186***

**© Berean Memorial Church of Irving, Texas, Inc. (1995)**

This morning, we come to a new section in Colossians 1:24-29. Our subject is "The Mystery of the Church," and this is segment number one.

**Liberalism**

Two world views dominate the thinking of all mankind. It is very important to understand this. One is liberalism. Liberalism is on the one hand, and that's categorized as "the left." It has certain characteristics. Liberalism, basically at heart, rejects the Bible as the inspired, inerrant Word of God. It takes the position that God has not spoken, let alone whether He's there at all. Liberalism discards the Bible as the mere writings of some religious thinkers over the centuries. Therefore, it has no binding authority on mankind. You must understand that that is at the heart of liberalism. There is no Word from God to bind it to certain standards; certain beliefs; or, certain principles. Therefore, man himself becomes the final authority, and in effect, his own God.

However, there are liberals who are Christians. And they do not feel comfortable with outrightly discarding the Bible as the Word of God. Therefore, they reinterpreted, or they challenge its authenticity. So, what they do is that they apply revision of human reason in order to update the matter, and to update the Scriptures, and thereby, they free themselves to be able to act upon the principle that personal character doesn't matter in terms of what the Bible says. It only matters in terms of what you seem to be a proper character.

It is characteristic of liberals to despise those who follow biblical principles, and to seek to discredit or to silence them. You may silence those who oppose liberalism by killing them, and that is often done. And church history is filled with martyrs who have suffered just that. Or, as is more often done in modern times, you may silence the voice of Scripture and the opposition to liberalism on the part of a believer by that believer absenting himself from that congregation. That's often done. Over a period of time, you can look back in your own experience, and see people who no longer show up for the instruction of the Word of God. Someplace along the line, something triggered; something hit; or, something clicked with them that was in opposition to their liberal views that irritated; that undermined; or, that challenge them, and they resisted. So, instead of killing the messenger, they simply disappear. They absent themselves. And there are various ways of justifying this, and they take cares and burdens of life upon themselves, and they justify that. But liberals do not like people of the book (the Bible).

Liberalism also is characterized by promoting economic socialism. They characteristically seek to limit (restrict) personal freedom, and they substitute for that elitist goals of social good, which are envisioned by these super-wise personalities that are in positions of authority and power. They attack those who resist government taxation. And they attack those who object to the redistribution of the fruits of one's labors. And they label people like that as lacking in compassion and being greedy. And they feel they're absolutely right, no matter that the history of liberalism has a trail of disasters behind it: of these efforts of human good that simply are not good because they are not in tune in compatibility with the Word of God.

It is characteristic of liberalism to rear youth (young people) to view their own failures and their own evils as the fault of others: "I had a negligent mother. I had a terrible father. I have fallen into abuse by society. I'm discriminated against." So, the youth are taught to whine and to have their enormous self-pity because of their condition that they themselves have brought upon themselves.

We have had a recent test that's been given annually on mathematics and science, in which students of various countries are rated against one another. As you might expect, the United States came out at the bottom. We're even lower than South Africa. Fortunately, the Asian nations did not participate. Those guys are pretty smart. And we would have been even lower than that – than what we came out. But there's one thing that American high school students were number one at. Guess what? Self-esteem. Here, the dummies at the bottom of the pile in math and science have the greatest respect and self-esteem for themselves. Where did they get that? Out there at the public school, that so many of you love, and that you throw your children into. A Jew would never thought of throwing his kids over into Philistia High, even though it had a great athletic program – a great sports program over there. They were really great in Philistia on sports. They had a great drama program at Philistia High too. But do Christian parents care? No: "Here you go." We'll throw you into the mouth of Molech. After all, we did that with our infants. We threw them into the flaming mouth of Molech to satisfy his judgments against us, and to get his sympathy.

Our youth under liberalism are failed to blame somebody else for their conditions. Furthermore, they're trained that the government is responsible to provide for them. One immigrant came to the United States illegally and complained about not having access to certain welfare privileges, and he said, "I thought everybody United States was supposed to be equal." Well, because they don't know the Constitution, the Constitution never provides equality. It only provides equality of opportunity. It provides equal opportunity to use your unequal abilities. That is liberalism. And that has been true throughout the centuries.

**Conservatism**

On the other hand, opposite to this, you have conservatism. That is called "the right." Conservatism is characterized by accepting the Bible as the revealed, inspired, inerrant Word of God. It takes the position that God is there, and that He is not silent. Conservatives interpret the Bible literally, and they are subject to its teachings. Man is viewed as evil by nature; enslaved to a sin nature; and, in need of salvation, which can only come to him is a gift from God, by God's grace, through Jesus Christ, in order to transform that person to be able to produce divine good works instead of human-good, evil works. God's moral laws are clearly recognized in Scripture by conservatives, and they are not viewed as subject to revision. For conservatives, character makes a difference.

It is also characteristic of conservatives that they subscribe to the biblical principles of private property ownership and free enterprise capitalism. They do not subscribe to the view of liberals that what is yours is mine, and what is mine is mine alone. They take the principle that the fruits of your labors belong to you personally. They view charity, therefore, and welfare as a personal choice to object of one's own choosing from one's own possessions. You do not distribute other people's money to those that you favor. Government intrusion in areas of life not authorized by the Constitution is resisted by conservatives for the very simple reason that if you don't, you will lose your freedoms. That's why the Constitution was written – to prevent government from intruding into the private lives of people, so that freedom is lost.

Conservatives read the Constitution in the framework of original intent. All those men who wrote the Constitution, while not all were Christians, they were all people who came from the background of reformation Christianity in their sense of values. They respected what the Bible had to say. And they respected that there was a power out there, some of them deists, nevertheless, even in that, they recognized that God is out there. The deists thought that God made everything; set it in motion; and, then walked off and left it for man to work it. But when they had to work it, they had to look upon this in terms of biblical principles for society to be able to work with freedom without chaos. That was the trick.

You must remember that until the time our Constitution was written, there was never a nation in the world where everybody had freedom to do what he wanted to do without the society turning into a chaotic jungle. That's how great was the genius of the Constitution. Now, most young people don't have any idea of the structure of the government, let alone their seniors (their adults).

Conservatives believe that young people should be taught to be self-reliant; to act with economic integrity, working for themselves; and, to live by the standards of biblical integrity. God's moral codes are binding. So, for the conservative: God; family; church; and, society are all honored.

Now with this background between these two world views, I began thinking the other day, and it struck me: who was the first liberal in human history, and who was the first godly conservative? Who was the first liberal that set this concept in motion, and who is the first godly conservative who resisted it? Well, the first liberal in human history was Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve. And the first conservative was Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve. Both of these sons had the mind of God. They had it from the instruction that they had received from their parents, whose parents had been taught by God in the Garden of Eden, and subsequently.

Furthermore, they had instruction from God in the way that you and I might like to have it. They had direct communication from God. I'm sure you must have felt often, as I would, that I'd like to pick up a phone and dial the heavenly number to speak to the Lord to get an advisement on something. It'd be so nice to talk to Him directly. We are so helpless. We are so disoriented. We are so unsure of ourselves that that would really be nice. Well, these two sons heard the voice of God: "Don't do this. Do this." It was all very clear.

They had no doubt, consequently, that God existed. After all, they had heard His voice. And he had made His will very clear to them. Yet as the ungodly "left," Cain revised God's law when it came time to prepare an offering to the Creator. Because Cain was the first liberal left, he revised the rules. And instead of presenting a blood sacrifice which would represent the coming death of Christ for the sins of mankind, promised to his parents in the Garden of Eden, he brought an offering of vegetation. After all, he was a farmer.

His brother Abel, as a conservative, and a godly man who accepted the Word of God, he was part of the godly right. He obeyed by bringing a blood sacrifice. It's true that he was a keeper of the sheep, and therefore, there was no problem for him, but he had to make the choice. The sheep were available to Cain just as well.

Abel's obedience to God's Word brought commendation and blessing from God, while Cain's disobedience brought condemnation and judgment. That is the characteristic attitude of God toward liberalism and conservatism to this day: liberalism, in terms of biblical rejection; and, conservatism, in terms of biblical acceptance. It brings blessing or it brings judgment.

God spoke to Cain, and said, "Why are you doing this? Why don't you do the thing the way I've told you? Your symbol is wrong. Do right, and I'll be able to bless you, and all will be well with you." Then God said, "And if you don't, sin crouches at your door like an animal about ready to spring to destroy you, and it will. Liberalism is an animal that always crouching, tensing its muscles to destroy whatever stands in its way."

Well, what was Cain's response? He became very angry toward God. And he hated the conservative, godly Abel. Consequently, he did what liberals do. He silenced the voice of the conservative, godly Abel. Scripture makes it clear to us when it uses the word for "kill" for murder in the New Testament, that indicates death the way you kill a sheep. You take a knife; you jerk its head back; expose its throat; and, cut it across. You could just see this scene: the bitterness; and, the hatred, as Cain, the liberal, finally exploded and said, "I'll show you where your godly conservatism is going to get you." And he walked up and picked up the knife, probably, perhaps, even the same knife that Abel had just used to make his sacrifice. He grabbed his brother by the back of the head; jerked his head back; exposed his throat; slashed the knife across; cut the jugular vein; and, let his brother bleed to death. So, God said, "His blood cries out to Me for vengeance. I know what you did," when Cain denied it.

Cain's response, as the anti-Bible, liberal left was anger toward God, and hatred toward Abel, and resulted in his removing this righteous example. People who do not like the Word of God absent themselves for it. It's just that simple. When finally God speaks to you, instead of saying, "Lord, I need to think this through. You've hit a raw nerve in me spiritually," they absent themselves in the Word of God.

This conflict between liberalism and conservatism is heating up today to its explosive climax in the tribulation. The liberal left condemns the biblical and constitutional beliefs of the conservative right. In effect, liberals are saying that the godly right is out of the will of God. I hear people talking contemptuously about the extreme right, and even more specifically, the Christian right. When a liberal says that, he doesn't say that because he says, "I'm wrong, and they're making me feel bad." He's saying, "I'm right, and they're wrong. It's the extreme right – the Christian right. They're the people who are wrong. They're the people that are not under the approval of God.

Therefore, you have to realize how frighteningly and sobering is the attack upon the Christians everywhere today. It is the left saying that they are in the will of God, and that the biblical people are out of the will of God.

The tyranny of government with unrestrained power is going to destroy the United States. It will destroy the freedom that we enjoy. It will destroy the economic prosperity of this fruitful land. Hello, antichrist! He is waiting to come in to take over in the tribulation, and to build a society on the fondest principles of liberalism and on the fondest antagonism toward the Word of God, the Bible – a religious system that will accommodate all viewpoints, and God will be told to butt out.

The only hope for America is a society with access to doctrine, in order that we possess the mind of God. After the rapture of the church, society will be doomed because there are not going to be any of us around here who are still proclaiming the Word of God, and who are still fighting upstream against even what churches do.

One of our people recently said to me: "I sat in a church, listening to the preacher carrying on to his large congregation. And it was so terrible, and it was so completely wrong. It was so completely against what would be a blessing to them. I wanted to walk up to the pulpit and say, 'Tell this guy to step aside. You have it wrong. I want tell them the way it really is.'" And I'm sure that's how you must feel when we see that the Word of God is being ridiculed, and that we Christians are the ones who are being held in contempt.

Well, today, the church is nearing the end of its era. The angelic warfare is increasing in intensity. It is silencing and eliminating the godly conservatives. That is always the goal of Satan.

In this section that we begin today in Colossians, Colossians 1:24-29, the apostle Paul is going to focus in on the uniqueness of the body of believers in this church age. These people are being faced with liberals in the theological world in Colossae. They're being told that there's an angelic revelation, and that there is angelic power. And the apostle Paul has missed it completely. And his doctrine of salvation is short of the real insights that these people have. So, Paul says, "Let me tell you about the church – the church and the doctrines of Scripture of the church age, which is the only hope of mankind." It was the only hope then, and it is the only hope today.

**Paul is in Prison**

So, Colossians 1:24, the apostle begins with the sentence, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake." The word "now" here is a word referring to time. He is using this in reference to his current status. You may remember that when he is writing this book, he is in prison in Rome. So, he is saying, "Right here, in the midst of my present imprisonment, is also my suffering in Rome as a servant of God. Now I am rejoicing in my suffering for your sake." Paul says, "I'm in a condition which is conducive to discouragement and to depression." But what does he do? How does he feel? He says, "I am in this, rejoicing."

**Rejoicing**

This is a word that indicates a feeling of happiness. It is grammatically in the tense that indicates that its constant with him. Happiness is something that he experiences all the time, while he's constantly got that chain on him 24 hours a day. It's active voice in the grammar, indicating that it's his personal experience. He is rejoicing in (or in the midst of) "my sufferings:" "Now, in my present status, here in my imprisonment in Rome, I rejoice in my suffering.

**Suffering**

The Greek word "suffering" looks like this: "pathema." This is the word from which we get the English word "passion," which means suffering. We speak of the passion of Christ – the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the point of Paul's salvation, he was specifically told that sufferings would be a lifestyle with him. It would not be just suffering a little, but a lifestyle.

I think there's a lesson for us to learn that's very significant here, because when the devil wants to cut you out of God's service, how is he going to do it? One of the ways he will do it is through suffering. He will hit you with physical suffering. And that's one of the easiest thing to do. That's one of the easiest things for you to use as an excuse to get out of the Lord's service. He will hit you with emotional suffering – the stresses which have come into your life, so that you will be discouraged very easily when you're down. You'll throw up your hands, and say, "I don't even want to go to church. I don't want to do the work anymore."

He will hit you with economic problems, you will permit that to stand in the way of doing something that God's work needs to have done. Don't fall for that. That's a favorite device of Satan, to put you under some financial pressure. That was no problem for the poor widow, as the rich man stood at the temple giving their out of their wealth. That's when they would give. This poor would had nothing but her living expenses, and she gave it all to the Lord, because she was compelled by God to meet a need. And she was not going to let the suffering of her economic poverty keep her from doing the will of God. Suffering is the devil's ace card to keep you from being able to stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and to have rewards poured upon you. It's the stupidest thing in the world. Yet, Christians fall for that bait the devil every time.

Now, the apostle Paul was somewhat prepared. When he was saved, he was immediately informed by the Lord Jesus Christ that he was chosen for a very special mission. And that mission was going to be surrounded by suffering.

As we turn to Acts 9:15-16, I want you to remember that you are a chosen instrument of God. And as a chosen instrument of God, you have a mission in life. And when you try to perform that mission, you'll get suffering. As long as you stay on the sidelines, and don't mess around with you call and with your duty, the devil will leave you alone. He'll make things very nice for you.

In Acts 9:15-16, Ananias is told to go meet a man named Paul who has just been blinded on the Damascus Road, as he was on his way to Damascus to persecute (bring in) Christians as blasphemers, and to subject them to execution. This man now is blind, and Ananias is told to go to a certain house where this Saul of Tarsus is in prayer, blinded, and waiting upon God to see what comes next. Ananias is horrified. He says, "Lord, I know this man. I've heard of him. He is a persecutor. He is a terror of death to all of us who are believers in You.

Verse 15: "But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the gentiles, and kings and the sons of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for My namesake." So, right off the bat, it was made clear to Paul, and to those dealing with him that this man was a chosen instrument: "Go, for he." What is your name? Sam? Jane? Put your name in there: "is a chosen instrument of Mine." Every one of you are that.

Paul was, chosen, in a specific way, to bear testimony to the gentiles; to people in authority (in government); and, even to the rulers of Israel, and the people of Israel. Yours is going to be a little different. But you have the mission. And what's going to be interjected to keep you from fulfilling your mission is suffering. You will make promises and break them. You will plan to do things, and won't. You will try to do right, and won't. You will plan to maintain your integrity, and you won't. Satan will interject suffering.

So, Paul's life as God's servant and minister was going to be one of suffering. And indeed, that's what happened. He was thinking about that one time, as he wrote 2 Corinthians 11. And he was a little irritated by the fact that people in Corinth were putting on airs, and putting him down because Paul was the kind of a guy who had enormous abilities. He was a university-trained man. He had great, great natural abilities. And he had great fortitude, and he had a great vision from God. And he was not somebody who gave up easily. He kept on the firing line. Because of that, people everywhere were blessed, not the least of which were these people in Corinth. But it was a church full of people of carnality – people who were of a liberal persuasion. And they looked down upon Paul. Paul was not the kind of a guy who wanted to get his picture in the paper or on TV. He just didn't care to be in the public eye. What he cared for was to see that Jesus Christ was in the public eye.

So, on this occasion, Paul here, in dealing with these people, says to them, "Are they servants of Christ? I speak as if insane." He says, "Now, let me let talk in a way that maybe I shouldn't speak. But I'm a little irritated by these people, and their attitude toward me, and what God has enabled me to do for them.

"Are they servants of Christ? I speak as if insane. I'm more so, in far more labors, and in far more imprisonments: beaten, times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked – a night and a day I've spent in the deep. And I've been on frequent journeys and dangers from rivers; dangers from robbers; dangers from my countrymen; dangers from the gentiles; dangers in the city; dangers in the wilderness; dangers on the sea; and, dangers among false brethren. I've been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? If I have to boast, I will boast in what pertains to my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I'm not lying. In Damascus, the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands."

The apostle Paul knew what it was to suffer. He was told, "You're going to have a great ministry. You have a specific calling. You are My chosen instrument. But you will not do it if you let suffering knock you out of the game." That's the point. And indeed, he had the suffering, but he did not permit that to stop him.

Paul, on one occasion, when he was writing the book of Galatians, also observed one more thing about his sufferings – the kind of thing that most of us certainly have not yet experienced, and won't. And that is in Galatians 6:17. Paul's body bore the marks of his suffering as God's minister of the gospel. Paul says, in Galatians 6:17, "From now on, let no one cause trouble for me. For I bear on my body the brand marks of Jesus."

So, Paul didn't want any smart-mouthed, smart-alec talk and condemnation, and expressions, to teach him a better way. He had been in the battle. He knew what it was to be true to his calling. He knew what it was to suffer. And he knew what it was, even when there was not the money to do the work, to go back to his trade as a tent-maker, and to earn the money to do the work of God. Here's the minister. He's earning the money. And when the work of God doesn't have it, he supplies it. While others around Paul, who were far more able to do it, did not, because their particular suffering was able to knock them out of the service.

In Colossians 1:24, Paul says, "I rejoice in my sufferings." Sufferings for what? "My sufferings, for your sake" – the sufferings which were experienced by Paul in the course of serving God, were in the interests of the Colossian Christians. He wasn't suffering just on account of himself, for his own benefit. He was taking this on for the benefit of the believers. The Colossians felt bad about Paul's suffering. They heard about it, in getting the Word of God to them. But Paul's attitude was to rejoice in this suffering.

In Ephesians 3:13, in speaking to that group of believers, Paul says, "Therefore, I ask you not to lose heart in my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory." Paul says, "Please do not get discouraged. The people in Ephesus were that way too." Here's our great man, Paul. Here's the chosen man of God. And this man gets beaten around like this. This man is in poverty. This man is in lack. This man is struggling. He's one of the greatest men that has ever lived in human history. And here he is – the great apostle to the gentiles, and he's scraping around to do the work of God instead of his hands being untied. Paul says, "Don't let that discourage you. Our God permits Satan to have his day, and he's having his day with me. But I'm not going to let up. I'm not going to succumb to him. And don't you do that either."

Paul does not mean that he is suffering in place of the Colossians believers for their salvation. That will come up a little clearer here in a moment, too. But please be aware that Roman Catholicism uses this passage to justify purgatory – about suffering to pay for the sins of other people with your suffering. That is a heresy. And, of course, that isn't what Paul means. Paul is talking about suffering in the process of his service, even as the Lord Jesus Christ suffered in the process of His ministry, even before He got to the cross.

Paul's suffering is in the angelic warfare, in the interest of the gentiles in getting the word of salvation, and church-age doctors to them. Please remember that nobody among the apostles had the full picture on the doctrines pertaining to the church-age the way Paul did. Only he had this. And he had it because he spent three years in the Arabian Desert being personally taught by Christ. So, when this man speaks about the distinctive qualities of the church; the power system of the church age; and, the enablement to be a true man and a true woman in the royal family of God, he knew what he was talking about. He knew how the system works. He knew what God had provided. He knew what our duties were. He knew what our responsibilities were.

The apostle Paul was delighted to suffer for the Colossians in the process of getting God's mind to them. The book of Colossians was written from a prison cell. The sufferings of the Word of God were never a burden or a distress to Paul. He considered it simply an occupational hazard.

In 2 Corinthians 12:2, Paul again deals with his suffering – a thing that he calls "a thorn in the flesh." We don't know what this was, but it was one of those ongoing physical distresses. How many times have Christians said, because they have a physical problem: "I can't serve the Lord anymore? I have a physical pain that I constantly suffer. It goes in and out. I can't serve the Lord anymore with my skill (my ability). That's a serious, bad decision that needs to be done with great caution. Look, what Paul did in 2 Corinthians 12:7: "And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations (that is, all the revelations about the church age given to him), for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh – a messenger of Satan to buffet me, and to keep me from exalting myself."

God allowed Satan to cause a physical suffering on Paul, so that Paul would not start thinking more highly of himself than he should: "Concerning this, I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me:" "Lord, I'll do the job better. I'll be able to focus better on my mission if I don't have this physical problem. Remove it so that I can get back into service. God says, "Baloney. Physical suffering does not keep you from service. Your choice keeps you from service."

Also, in this case, there may be another connection. You remember earlier, we read that he was stoned. That happened at Lystra. They left him for dead. And I suspect they left him for dead because he was dead. When you throw these heavy boulders upon a person, to crush the body, and to crush the skull, the Jews didn't walk off and make a mistake that this guy was still alive. He was dead. And when he was dead, he went to heaven. And there, in another passage, he tells us how he saw things that were so magnificent and so tremendous, there in God's presence, that he was told by the Lord: "Paul, you have to go back. I'm going to put your body together. You're going to come back alive. And, indeed, his friends went out, and they found him alive, and they carried him back, and got him back on his feet.

However, the Lord said, "You have seen something that you must never tell anybody. One of these days, you're going to be preaching, and you're going to become euphoric, and carried away with the magnificence of what is ahead for people, especially when you want to comfort them in their sufferings, and in their hard times, to remind them, "Look ahead. I was up there. Here's the way it was." And maybe, to reveal what heaven really is like, might make a lot of people (Christians) careless with their lives, so that they might even think maybe suicide is better. I don't know.

In any case, the Lord said, "Paul, you must not speak, and I'm going to do something to keep you reminded of it." Here it is – this thorn in the flesh. This was something that was constantly painful. And every time it jabbed him, he remembered: "Keep your mouth shut about heaven. Do not tell people what you saw there. They're not prepared. They're not ready to know that now."

Verse 8: "Three times I asked for it to depart. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may indwell me."

Then he goes on to that tenth verse, where he describes the five facets of the spiritual maturity structure of the soul that we have studied so frequently: "Therefore, I am well-content with weakness; with insults; with distresses; with persecutions; and, with difficulties, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

These facets of the soul: grace orientation; mastery of the details of life; a relaxed mental attitude; the capacity to love; and, inner happiness – these things that make up the structure of a Christian's place of defense and place of offense in the battle. These are wonderful qualities that are built up in the soul by doctrine, and which carry a person to the super-grace level of living – that living where you are at the prime of your spiritual life. That's what Paul was. And that's why Paul could take suffering in stride. He did not use distress. Satan will use people to impose distress upon you. But where do you have the authority to turn your back upon God, and say, "My distress is just too much?"

We live in a society where our youth are reared to believe that what they are is someone else's problem that was in their background. The truth of the matter is that the only problem you have is you – your own choices.

Oh, how I love Dr. Laura Schlessinger. I like it when she socks it to these yo-yos who are talking about who gave them their problems. She says, "No. Stop. You don't have any problems. You are the problem." Paul said, "I understand that, and I will not knuckle down to the devil."

Paul says, "I rejoice. I have this suffering. I do it because of you." Paul rejoiced in his suffering because of the positive volition that these Colossians had to God's world view – the doctrine that was brought to them. They became the Christian right. Paul had never met them, and had never spoken to them face-to-face. It was only through the fact that he had the contact with their pastor-teacher Epaphras. Epaphras was a great student of the Bible. He learned from Paul. He went back to the Colossians, and he gave them the instruction. And they came back to Paul and said, "Here's how they're acting. Here's their reaction. This is the way they're doing." And they were magnificent. They were out there. They were talking about the Word of God. They're speaking to people. And Paul says, "That's what gives me satisfaction in the midst of my prison sufferings."

The bottom line is that it is always the goal of Satan to silence Christians about Scripture, and to remove them from active service by their suffering. That's what Satan wants to do. So, the next time you are inclined to say, "Oh, I can't do this because I'm suffering because of this or that," remember Paul. He never let suffering stand in the way. As long as there was life in his body, and blood in his veins, and breath in his lungs, he kept going.

Matthew 5:12: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Where would we have been if those prophets had been silenced just because they were under the attacks and the sufferings of Satan's agents?

Acts 5:40-42: "Then they took his advice. And after calling the apostles in, they flogged them, and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and then release them." They were being warned here. The Pharisee leaders were being warned to go slow with these men. Gamaliel, the respected teacher of Paul, said, "You better be careful. If these men are really of God, and you're opposing them, then you're opposing God." So, they began to be a little concerned. They said, "Let's just beat them, and then we'll turn them loose."

"So, they (the apostles) went on their way after the beating from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" – service in spite of suffering.

Hebrews 10:32-39: "But remember the former days when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming shares with those who were so treated. And you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better position, and an aiding one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which was a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet, in a very little while, he who was coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith. And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul."

So speak we as Christians. We're not going to shrink back because we have some problems; some suffering; or, some disruption into our luxurious lives that we live. But we are going to stand by the call to God. Why? To receive what He has promised. We're not always faithful in what we promise God, but, by heaven, He is faithful to us. And What He has promised is eternal rewards and great treasures in heaven for those who perform their mission. And the devil is going to use suffering as a means to keep you from doing it. That is the heart of liberalism. The heart of godly conservative Christians is to go on, from moment to moment, and live one day at a time. Paul suffered because he told the pagan gentiles that their gods were false, and that Jesus Christ was the way, and the only way; and, because he told the Jews that Jesus Christ was the Messiah Savior, and that they were both (Jews and gentiles) doomed to the lake of fire without Christ.

What do you suffer for? What does the liberal left, that you associate with in society, despise you for? And what do they impose upon you of distress? It depends on what you're saying. It depends on how faithful you are to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and how loyal you are to Him so that nothing stands in His way. The world is full of Christian losers. Let's all be winners.

Christ, our Father, we thank You so much, Dear Lord, for what Your Son has done for us, and for the mission to which we have all been called. How wonderful it is to know that we are saved because we are a chosen instrument, and we pray, God, to help us to rise above our trivial selves, and to walk in the magnificent pattern of the apostle Paul, a man of God, who to the end could say, "I have run the course."

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

[**Back to the Colossians index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/colossians.htm)

[**Back to the Bible Questions index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/allarticles.htm)