***Christian Suffering

Colossians 1:24-29

COL-191***

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2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is inspired by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

1 Corinthians 2:9: "Just as it is written: 'Things which eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man: all that God has prepared for those who love Him. For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God."

Romans 15:4: "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction – that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope."

This morning, we turn to the Scriptures once more, to Colossians 1:25-29, "The Mystery of the Church," segment number nine.

**Suffering**

Once the Lord Jesus Christ began His public ministry, following His water baptism, suffering became a part of His life on a daily basis. The suffering was both spiritual and physical. The sinless Son of God was opposed, ridiculed, and despised by the sinners He had come to save. The Lord's life of suffering service to God climaxed in His suffering death upon the cross, bearing the sins of mankind as the Lamb of God, to satisfy the justice of God in behalf of the lost.

In 1 Peter 2:21-24, the apostle summarizes that ultimate suffering when he says, "For you have been called for this purpose since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps (in His steps of suffering), who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth. While being reviled, He did not reveal in return. While suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him Who judges righteously, and He Himself for our sins, and His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. For by his wounds, you were healed."

After the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven, following His resurrection, suffering in the devil's world for proclaiming salvation, and the grace of God fell upon church-age believers, the Devil could no longer get against him to great suffering. Now that suffering was to hit His body in the form of individual believers. Paul tells the Colossian Christians, in Colossians 1:24, that he himself has had his share of suffering in behalf of the body of Christ, the church. Paul himself suffered in many ways as people were won to the faith in Christ through the apostle's witnessing. The labor of giving birth to new believers through the gospel, once borne by Jesus in His earthly ministry, was being born by Paul, along with all the saints.

**Bible Doctrine**

Bible doctrine, from salvation to grace living, is not a welcome topic to the unsaved man, and suffering is the normal way of life. Bible doctrine divides people. When they are taught, the communicators suffer, and those who are negative to the message flee. That is the way of life of the believer. This is what Paul recognizes here in Colossians 1:24 – that he himself knows what it is to suffer. For what? For wrongdoing? No, but for doing what is right, and for trying to help people to have meaning in their life: in time; and, in eternity. The Lord Jesus tried to prepare all of us for this. In Luke 12:51-53, we have His admonition of what we could expect. Jesus says, "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth?" I tell you, no, but rather division. For from now on, five members and one household will be divided: three against two; and, two against three. They will be divided: "father against son; son against father; mother against daughter; daughter against mother-in-law; mother-in-law against daughter-in-law; and, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." That is the norm of the impact of the Word of God. It does not bring peace when there is a negative response to it. Yes, it will bring peace if there is an acceptance of the truth. But in most cases, what it does is divide family members against family members. And all of us have had that experience.

The apostle John, in the gospel of John 8:31-32, points out that Jesus, therefore, said to the Jews who had believed Him: "If you abide in My Word (volition to doctrine), then you are truly disciples of mine, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." What gives freedom in life? Freedom from being a slave of sin; freedom from being a slave to the sin nature; and, freedom from walking in the corrupt morass of our society; its ideals; its ways; and, its institutions. What gives you freedom from that? What will give it to your children? Nothing but the World. It is the Word of God, when received, that gives guidance to enlighten the heart so that we are not fools.

I constantly marvel and try to ponder why it is that any Christian would want to go out in the slew of despondency: the morass of the evil culture of the world system. Why would they do it? Why would they want to? Why would they find that attractive? But if you are not careful, as Jesus says, "To abide in His Word; and, to abide in the doctrinal principles of Scripture, then you will not have the strength to be His follower (his disciple), but instead you will be following the ways of the world and its leader, Satan.

Notice John 8:40: "But as it is," Jesus says, "to those who opposed Him as He spoke to them, including the religious leaders. But as it is, you are seeking to kill me: a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God. This Abraham did not do." Here again, Jesus said, "When I speak the Word of God, it is not going to make peace among people." It's going to divide person from person. That is the problem that will intimidate you, and have me handing out the evangelism brochure, because of the reaction you may receive.

Drop down to John 8:43: "Why do you not understand what I am saying?" Jesus says, "It is because you cannot hear My Word. The word is spoken, but they do not comprehend it." They don't get it: "You are of your father, the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning. It does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature. For he is a liar, and the Father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me." That's why we caution you that the world system – its whole structure, and all of its institutions are lie upon lie upon lie; and, deception upon deception, in the most sophisticated and glamorous way. Unless you're careful, you're believing everything that is against God. Unless you're careful, you're losing your life of participating in the things of this world, and bypassing participation in the things of God.

And don't be so foolish (those of you who have older kids), to think that those big bodies, as some parents sometimes indicate to me, that these are not children. They say, "These are young adults." No, they're not. I don't care if you're in high school. High school is just an elevated glamor class of elementary school. It is not like you're up in a career school, or like you're up there in college, or like you're up there where you're really training for some like career, where things really make a difference after high school is over. It's just a blip on the screen that you can't hardly remember, and it is not of any great significance. Yet, people let their lives revolve around the things of this world system. And what they're involved in is untruth upon untruth, because who set up the system? The devil. And if you cannot drum that into the heads of your kids – that the world, and everybody around them in the world system, is a hazard to their eternal well-being, and their temporal well-being. The devil is going to get his fangs in them.

In John 17, the high priestly prayer of Jesus Christ, in behalf of the Christians, the body of Christ, the church. John 17:17: Jesus say, "Sanctify them (speaking of Christians – set them aside in the truth." What does that mean? "Your Word is truth." If you are set aside in the truth, you will be part of the division attack (disruption), but you will be under the protective custody of God. How will you be in the truth? It is the doctrinal principles of the Word of God. If nobody's teaching that to you (if nobody's exposing you to it), you're going to be a sitting duck: "Sanctify them in the truth. Your Word is truth." If you don't have the Word, you've got nothing.

The apostle Paul established this principle of suffering for a lot of reasons. Very often, we suffer for no other reason than being misunderstood. Very often, they want to misrepresent us, as Christians, in what we believe, or what we do, but we are misunderstood. This happens always, even for children.

One of our bright students in prekindergarten this year, after their first week of school got going, his mother asked him how he liked school. He said, "Oh, it's good. But this year, we happened to have a few families from India whose children are in our school." He said, but I don't like those Indian kids." His mother said, "Oh, why not?" He said, "Oh, I just don't like them." But she didn't press it. A few days later, he came home and said, "Those Indian kids are all right. I like them." She said, "Well, why didn't you like them at first?" He said, "I didn't like sitting next to them at the table. They carried bows and arrows, and tomahawks, and they lived out in the wild. I was afraid to be by them."

That's an example of being misunderstood; stereotyping; and, a bad reputation. That's why we are called the Christian right, which is better than being the Christian wrong, of which there are a lot of them. And we are the conservatives, the fundamentalists, and all that. Those are words (the pejorative words) to put us down in order that, as the apostle Paul says, to make us the garbage heap of human society. This is the suffering of being set aside by the truth of doctrine (to God's mind), over against the deceit of the devil's mind. So, the apostle, in Colossians 1:24, has said, "No, I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake (that is, the Colossian Christians), in my flesh, my physical sufferings." Furthermore, he says, "I do my share on behalf of His body. I have had my share of suffering on behalf of His body, which is the church." That suffering is on behalf of the church, of which the Colossians were a part of." Suffering in what way, Paul? "In filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions. That is an important word here.

Where does the role of suffering come in for a Christian? Roman Catholics take this verse, and say, "Christ died for your moral guilt. He suffered. Now, you, in time, must suffer for your temporal guilt. You must suffer in this life to pay for your sins. If you do not suffer, what Christ did will not take you to heaven. That is not what Paul is saying. Here is the Greek word for filling up. It is one of those long words: "antanapleroo" (filling up). This is made up of three words. First of all, the "an" is the preposition "ante." "Ante" team means, "instead of," or "in turn." The second part is another preposition: "ana." This word means "up." And then "pleroo," the verb, means "to fill."

So, what you have here is the concept of: "filling up, instead of." You'll never get it from the English. But that's why I'm here. This word "ante" has the very special meaning. It is the picture of a balance. Here is a scale. And it has a balance beam. And it has two sides (two trays) on which you put things in order to balance things: one side to the other. The idea here is to balance two things upon the scale. One side of the scale has already been filled up. You and I, as Christians, come into your association with God, to fill up the other side of the scale, in order to balance these two things. And what is it that we're going to balance? The idea is that the Lord Jesus Christ has suffered to the full. The apostle Paul is applying this to himself personally first, in providing salvation for him and the church. This is on one side of the scale. This is what Jesus Christ done.

Now Paul says, "I am willing to "antanapleroo" (to fill up in place of) the other side, to balance what Christ has done." Paul is willing to match the suffering of the Lord in bringing the gospel of grace salvation to the gentiles and by teaching the Word of God to convert. This is what Paul brings here on the other side. And his suffering then balances the scale of what Christ has done to what Paul has done. This is the constant life that you and I live as a Christian. We are either filling up the other side, day-by-day, and balancing the suffering of Christ, or we are not. Paul was willing to fill up his side of the balance scale in order to match the sufferings of Christ.

Now this suffering does not obviously refer to the sufferings that Jesus Christ did upon the cross, in order to satisfy the justice of God, and provide salvation. This is the suffering that He, as a human being, experienced as He walked the paths and the roads of Palestine, and as He walked through Israel: tired; hungry; worn out; abused; sneered at; and, made fun of (all that was involved). This is the real walk with God of the Christian. It isn't to go out and try to find somebody who will beat you up, to find suffering. There are people who do that. Come Easter time, some idiots will walk around carrying crosses on their shoulders. Others will have these long whips with something in it, and they'll beat themselves on the back. You have to go down to the jungles of some benighted pagan section for that kind of Christianity. But people think that that suffering is going to help. It's not. It's worthless.

The suffering that Paul is talking about is the suffering that's involved when you take the position in order to serve the Lord: "mutually," in terms what this word means. As He Christ filled one side of the scale with suffering, I, in turn, matched it with my side of suffering. Suffering where? On earth, in the course of Christian service, and in the course of doing God's work that he is equipped you to do. The apostle Paul made it clear that he knew what it was to suffer for the Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:3-11 is a classic passage. Paul says, "Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, Who comforts us all in our afflictions, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." We suffer on this earth at the devil's hands. And along comes God, and He comforts us. Somebody else comes along, as a believer, and we can balance the scale of the comfort that God gave him, with the comfort that we have received: "For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours, in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ." We can be a comfort to other believers, in turn.

In verse 6, Paul says, "But we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same suffering which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that, as you are sharers in our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort. For we do not you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction, which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life." This is what Paul was putting on the other side of the balance scale, to balance the suffering that Jesus experienced as he went about proclaiming the truth: "Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, Who raises the dead (sufferings to the point of danger of your life), Who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us – He, on Whom we have set our hope, and will yet deliver us. You also, in join in helping us through our prayers." There you are, putting something on the other side of the scale, balancing, because it does take time to pray. If you come out for prayer meeting Wednesday night, it takes trouble. It's a little suffering to come out to do it: "And thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed upon us, through the prayers of many." But when you do pray, and when you do put yourself out to pray, and when you put yourself out to join us in prayer, the result is that you are equating and matching up what Jesus Christ did in suffering in your behalf.

So, the word means "filling up – matching one side of the scale with the side that Christ has filled. It does not mean that Paul's suffering is needed to balance Christ's suffering in order to provide reconciliation for the lost. That is a Roman Catholic idea of suffering, and it is totally unscriptural. The book of Colossians, we have seen, has made that clear.

In Colossians 1:20-23 (you remember): "And through Him, to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross, through Him, I say: whether things on earth, or the things in heaven. And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him, holy and blameless and beyond reproach. If indeed, you continue in the faith, firmly established (first class 'if' condition), then you will do that, and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel (the hope that will inevitably be fulfilled) that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, of which I, Paul, was made a minister."

So, the apostle Paul makes it very clear that the sufferings of Christ is all we need for salvation. But in the process of Jesus bringing that, as a human being, it cost Him a lot in personal suffering. And that's what we are called to balance off.

Suddenly, Christian service takes on a very serious aspect. We are, after all, living in the final stages of the age of grace. We are, after all, living when the Roman Empire of old, which has been in the form of abeyance, is now coming together again. You remember the Roman Empire was a world government. It is not gone. It is simply being revived now with the concepts and the enthusiasm for world government today. And gradually, the antichrist will finally bring it all together.

So, this is what we are called to do. You do have to put yourself out to serve the Lord. It does take you out of all the comforting things you could be doing. It does put an interruption in your life. It does make you think: "What will you have me to do, Lord?" When Paul got slapped on that Damascus road, he looked up into heaven, and realized how wrong he was. There was Jesus Christ. This was all true. What did he say? "What do you want me to do?" And the Lord will say, "Here's what I want you to put on your side of the scale of suffering, to balance what I have done for you, when I was on the earth ministering." The suffering and the death of Jesus Christ, as the sinless Lamb of God on the cross was completely sufficient for propitiating the justice of God. Make no mistake about that.

Do not misinterpret this verse: 1 John 2:2: "He himself (Jesus Christ) is the propitiation (the satisfaction) for our sins (satisfaction for the justice of God, which is death for sin), and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." All the world has now been covered by what Christ has done: His propitiation on the cross.

Colossians 2:9-15 tell us what Christ did. That's all we need for salvation. Our works do not add to that: "For in Him, all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form. And in Him you have been made complete. And He is the head overall rule and authority. And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith, and the working of God, Who raised Him from the dead – this symbolic form of water baptism. And when you are dead in your trespasses, in your transgressions, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancel out the certificate of debt consisting of the against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken us out of the way, having nailed it to our cross."

Everything was paid by Him on the cross. Of what? Of the bill of goods against us: "And when he had disarmed the rulers and the authorities, the demonic hosts and Satan, he made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him." So, it is very clear that what Christ has done has covered everything that we need done for salvation.

The apostle Paul, in his final letter to his young associate, Timothy, interestingly enough, stressed this thing again. Jesus paid it all. That's it. Jesus paid it all. You cannot add to what is paid in full.

In 2 Timothy 2, Paul stresses that Timothy: "Remembered Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship, even to imprisonment as a criminal. But the Word of God is not in prison. For this reason, I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen; that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, and with it, eternal glory." Yes, Paul suffered physical abuse, but he also mostly suffered being rejected. He suffered by being treated as a fool for the gospel of the grace of God, and for the doctrines of Scripture that he taught. The religious superiority gang looked down their noses at him. That is what you will experience. And you cannot be spooked away from handing out our evangelistic brochure. You cannot be spooked away from understanding what is on that yellow sheet. So, if you have to speak it, you know exactly how to go about it, in an orderly fashion, and give the person what the Holy Spirit can use to bring conviction.

Paul says, "I want to do that because I don't want to be ashamed when I finally see the Lord." That's a good motivation – to be ashamed when the Lord will say, "Look at all the opportunities I gave you. Look at all the people you rub shoulders with. Look at all the people who could have been influence. Can you imagine what would happen if everybody in this in this auditorium right now hands out one booklet to one person this week? And all of a sudden, they look and they say, "Where did this come from?" And they see the church and location, and they say, "I think I'll go and look in on that. And someone may go from salvation to grace living, and the super-grace life just because you sowed a seed.

In 2 Timothy 4:6-8, Paul finally – this is the last thing he wrote. This is the last chapter. It's all over now. The last thing he wants to say, one more time to Timothy: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering." He says, "I'm a dead man:" "And the time of my departure has come (I'm about to be executed). I have fought the good fight. I've finished the course. I've kept the faith." He says, "I have done my job. I fulfilled my mission for which I was born." That's a great thing to be able to say: "I have finish the thing." I didn't just pop in and pop out; pop in and pop out. Week in and week out, I kept doing the ministry that God gave me to do. Furthermore, I've kept the faith, which means that I've been true to doctrine. I haven't gone off into all the crazy stuff of the religions of the world, and the perverted Christianity religions. I've kept the faith.

Do you know how he did that? He did that by non-subjective non-emotionalism. He did it by being objective; learning the Word of God; and, acting upon it. He did not play the foolish game of Satan, to be manipulated by his emotions.

We seeing in whole nations now that has been made a fool of, because Americans have lost their way with God. So, the only way they know how to deal with anything, relative to right and wrong, and wisdom, is by how they feel about it. The devil has made fools of them all. Only the believers are standing firm, who understand what is really taking place, and are not deceived.

In verse 8, Paul says, "In the future, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and, not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." The crown of righteousness is given to the believers who have logged a maximum amount of time in temporal fellowship. I kept my nose clean, and when I stepped out of line, I confessed it; I got back on track; and, I kept going. And I forgot what I did in the past and I didn't stand up before people and talk about it. The past is done, and God is forgive, and I'm rolling ahead. And I'm glad that I did. I'm going to love His appearing. And I'm not going to do anything to be ashamed of saying, "Yes, you will suffer. Yes, you'll have to stand firm." That is the nature of the Christian life.

The suffering of the Christian saint is not vicarious, as was that of Christ on the cross. You don't suffer to help someone else into heaven. That's the Catholic idea. When you suffer, it is because of your own personal service for God.

This word "antanapleroo," in the grammar – this a present tense. The present tense in the Greek language tells us that Paul is saying, "I'm constantly on the job, suffering in whatever way I have to; being inconvenienced in whatever way I have to; being put out in whatever way I have to; and, sacrificing whatever I have to, to give out the gospel, and pointing people to doctrinal understanding." I keep bringing them into Berean Church. I keep informing them of what's available. I keep handing out tapes to them. I keep doing this all the time. That's present tense. And it's active voice, which means that Paul personally is experiencing the suffering because he is personally engaged in that kind of sacrificial service for God.

It is not easy, in a luxury country like America, to provide sacrificial service for God. Missionaries on the field, like our friends, the Turnbows – They know what it is to sacrifice their lives in suffering for God. In our country, for most Christians, it's a little money (which is important) given to God's work. But my personal word – my lips are glued together with super-glue. Paul says, "Not in a million years for me. I personally am involved in it," and that's the only way to go. And, it's indicative – it's a statement of fact.

Now, there's another thing here in this Colossians 1:24. Paul says, "I'm filling up that which is lacking in Christ's affliction – that which is coming short in the afflictions of Jesus Christ. It's important, again, that I show you this word that is in the Greek for the "affliction." It's the Greek word "thlipsis." This refers to the sufferings endured by Jesus Christ – not on the cross. This word is never used in the Greek testament about sufferings of Christ on the cross, which ties back with that first word that is balancing the scale here in service, in this life. This word refers to the humiliation that Jesus Christ experienced in His daily ministry, before the cross. This word is never used in the New Testament to refer to the vicarious sufferings of Christ for the sins of the world – the suffering He did vicariously, that it's in our place. He took in, in our behalf. This never deals with what He did on the cross. This is the humility that He took upon Himself in his daily walk.

**Kenosis**

Do you remember the doctrine of the kenosis? It has been a long time since we talked about that. The Greek word "kenosis" means "I empty myself. I put aside" is a better way to say it: I put aside. What did Jesus Christ do when He came? Well, when you looked at Him, He looked like any man here – just a human being. But internally there was deity, but it was a deity which He had shielded. Kenosis means "I empty myself of my outward demonstration of deity. I've shielded it. And that's the doctrine of the kenosis. He, who was the Creator, was willing to come down and walk among men, as one of them looking like he was a men. As Hebrews says, "He was made in the likeness of men" – not quite, because He didn't have a signature, but He walked among us and He shielded His glory.

**The Mount of Transfiguration**

That's what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter, James, and John are sitting, looking at Him, and all of a sudden they're startled. They stagger back, because suddenly He opened the door of His physical body, and He let the glory shine through. And they were thunderstruck. Oh, they knew about the glory of God. But when they saw that brilliant, magnificent, white glory light, they gasped, and could hardly stand, and had to fall upon their faces, as people who were sinners.

The kenosis doctrine (the shielding of Himself) and the humiliation that that was for the Son of God, is described in Philippi as 2:5-8, where Paul says, "Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as a thing to be grasped, but empty ('kenoo')." He emptied Himself, that is, He laid aside His privileges: "Taking the form of a bond servant, and being made in the likeness of men." He didn't have a sin nature. He wasn't quite like us, but in every other respect, He was: "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross."

Yes, if you're going to serve the Lord, and if you're going to be a Christian voice, you're going to have to humble yourself. You have to take it on the chin. You are going to have to find that people who are so spiritually blind and ignorant in the things of God are going to come and tell you, point blank to your face: "It ain't necessarily so," when you proclaim a truth that the Word of God says, "Yes, this is the way it is." And you are going to have to take that kind of emotional suffering.

Jesus suffered for righteousness sake in His daily life. He experienced exhausting service to people. He was pressured emotionally by opposition from Satan's world. Please remember that Satan's world is always pressuring you with the kind of pain that Jesus suffered on the way to the cross. Satan is always going to be pressuring you with physical incapacities. You should remember to pray for one another. These people who serve all over the Berean ministries – I'm questioning you and reminding you that their physical well-being is a prime object of attack for Satan. If you can undermine bring down the physical structure, you've got an incapacitated servant of God. Therefore, you do your part in taking care of the temple of the Holy Spirit. You pray for one another, that Satan is not going to be able to make Jobs out of the people of God, and put them to undeserved suffering. You should be aware of this vile creature's presence. He's everywhere in society. It's his world. And that world, when you get closer and closer to the tribulation, is going to exercise that hatred against Christians physically (against believers physically). It is going to create great suffering for believers in the tribulation. We haven't shed blood yet – most of us. But Christians in China have. Any suffering, however, of the Christian in God's service, you should remember, is part of Christ's affliction in the truth.

So, let's tie it up with Acts 9:1-5. This word has told us that we're going to match up, and balance up, the sufferings of Christ that He suffered on this earth, in ministering the Word of God with our suffering; and, as we minister the Word of God, we will be as courageous as Him. We'll balance the scale so that we, too, will experience that kind of suffering that has to do with propagating the Word of God.

When you suffer, then God suffers, because you are part of the body of Christ. When you suffer for your faithfulness in witness, He suffers. Acts 9:1-5: "Now, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest." Here's the unsaved apostle Paul. He hates Christians with a vengeance. He's been imprisoning them wherever he can get his hands on them, and bringing them to death and judgment. So, now: "He goes to the Jewish religious authority, and he asks the high priest for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way (the Christian Way), both men and women, he might bring them down to Jerusalem. And it came about, having received this authority, that he, as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus Whom you are persecuting." Who? Wait a minute. How could Paul be persecuted Jesus Who was in heaven. Suddenly he realizes that something is really wrong. There is Jesus Christ. He's alive. He's right there in heaven. He's right there before him. He sees Him. He hears Him. He said, "Who are you?" Jesus said, I'm the One that you're persecuting." How is he persecuting Him? He's persecuting Christians?

When you suffer for your witness, Christ suffers along with you. So, the strike hits you. This is very dangerous business. And on the human level, striking at the believer who is doing his job, and who is true to the Word of God, and who is under the protective custody in favor of God – to strike at that person is to strike at the apple of his eye. The consequences, whether you're a Christian or an unbeliever, will be to your eternal detriment and sorrow. God takes care of his own.

The undeserved suffering of believers in building up the church body is an honor which God will reward in heaven. Matthew 5:11-12 point this out to the disciples right from the beginning: "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Jesus says, "Fine, let them beat up on you. Let them abuse you spiritually, and maybe even sometimes physically, but with their words, because when you come into My presence, for every bit of abuse you took, I'm going to reward you magnificently."

2 Timothy 2:12: "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny him, he will also deny us." If we do not accept the suffering; if we try to evade; or, if we deny Him, He will deny us at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and the reward that He promised potentially will not be three.

1 Peter 4:12-16: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you. But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also, at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exaltation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of Christ rests upon you. By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil doer, or a troublesome meddler. But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let them not feel ashamed. But in that name, let him glorify God."

Verse 19: "Therefore, let those, also, who suffer according to the will of God, entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right." That is the promise. When you suffer for your service, you’re balancing the scale of the sufferings of Christ that he suffered on this earth, and God suffers with you, and you will most certainly be honored and rewarded for that abuse. But this is the devil's way to try to silence you. Maybe you've been silent too long. Let's change it this day. Take a brochure, and get on out there.

Dear God, we thank you for Your word. We pray for Your great prosperity upon our witnessing efforts, and our understanding that we are under the disapproval of the satanic world. And he has great power. And we thank You that we are under Your protective care. But we pray that we lose that care when we're out of fellowship, and then we become fools like any unbeliever. So, we pray, our Heavenly Father, to help us to be proud to be able to be part of filling up the scale of balancing the faithfulness of Christ in His service, with our faithfulness during our lifetimes. We pray that You will help us to remember that prayer changes the things that need to be changed. And we pray that You will therefore help us to be a people of prayer as well as the people of faithfulness to the Word. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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