

Lesson 23
Paul's Ministry Of Suffering

Col 1:24 (Paul) Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:
KJV

I. What did Paul mean by his statement that he was “fill(ing) up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ”?

- a. The clear understanding is that Paul believed that he had the **ability** to fill up whatever was left behind by Christ to be filled.
- b. He also states that whatever required filling qualified as further **afflictions of Christ**.
- c. Paul states that what he (Paul) is personally undergoing in his flesh directly **benefits** the body of Christ, the Church.

II. What this verse has lead some to conclude.

- a. In this verse, some suggest that Paul was advocating the **ascetic life** and that life calls for volitional personal suffering.
 1. Asceticism comes from the Greek *askesis* which means practice, bodily exercise, and more especially, **athletic training**.
 2. It involves the struggle against the animal passions inherent in man's nature and includes **mortification**, **unworldliness**, and **detachment**.
 3. The early Christians adopted it to signify the practice of the spiritual discipline performed for the purpose of acquiring the **habits of virtue**.
 4. The **Scriptural basis** for this belief may be found throughout the NT but especially in: Matt 10:38, Luke 14:26, John 18:36,1 Cor 9:27
- b. Particularly in the middle ages, the believed **merit** of the practice of asceticism included such things as:
 1. Self induced suffering as a means of **penance** for sins.
 2. Voluntary humility through vows of **poverty**.
 3. The virtue of **monastic life**.
 4. The virtue of **fasting and abstinence**.

III. What is the correct Biblical response to asceticism?

- a. It is an error to **measure** one's virtue and or spirituality by the extent and character of self induced suffering. Col 2:20-23
- b. It is arrogance to assume our self induced suffering (penance) can add anything of merit to the work of Christ on our behalf in regards to His **satisfaction for sin**. Rom 5:1-2
- c. However, it is true the flesh is continuously lusting against the spirit, and suppression and self-denial are **necessary** to control the natural man and his sinful desires. Gal 5:17
- d. Biblical asceticism begins with the **motive imparted** by the Spirit which moves the believer to desire to love God and to do His will. Rom 5:5
- e. Growth in virtue, which is the positive aspect of asceticism, means working out our salvation and moving towards the goal of **sanctification**. Phil 2:12
- f. This requires that the believer receive certain **enablements** from God: Phil 4:13

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1. **Sanctifying grace** which is the power to "do" all that Scripture commands. Phil 2:13
2. The **indwelling** presence of the Holy Spirit who imparts supernatural powers or energies that enable obedience. Rom 8:11
3. These enablements must be **actuated** by the will of the believer. Ps 119:173
4. Repetitious performance of virtuous actions when done under these conditions results in **sanctification**. 1 Thes 4:3-4

IV. What was Paul actually saying in this verse?

- a. The afflictions that Christ left behind that Paul was filling involved **the work** of building the Church. Matt 16:18
- b. This includes teaching every person in all wisdom, so that he might present each one **perfect** in Christ Jesus. Col 1:28
- c. In so doing, Paul himself is called to endure hardship, affliction and **suffering** and in this he rejoices. Col 1:24
- d. Paul's ownership of this ministry is so passionate that in it he is made one with Christ. In this sense, what he suffers **Christ also suffers**. Phil 1:20-22

V. Application

- a. While it is not given to us in the present age to do the things that Paul was called to do, each believer does have a calling in this life.
- b. At a minimum, each believer is called to participate with Christ in his/her own individual process of sanctification.
- c. To what extent are you passionate about participating with Christ in your personal sanctification?
- d. What stands in the way of your having such a passion?
- e. What will you do about it?