

A Puzzling Verse

How did Paul help to fill up or complete what was lacking in the afflictions of Christ?



“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.”

~*Colossians 1:24* (NJKV)

This verse is not speaking of Christ’s sufferings which took place on the cross in payment for our sins. There is nothing incomplete about our Lord’s atoning work on our behalf. He paid the price in full, as indicated by His victory cry, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). Every believer can rest fully in that wonderful finished work. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing can be taken from it. It was exactly what was needed to save us from our sins and from an eternal hell.

The Lord Jesus suffered afflictions throughout His earthly ministry. He told His followers that they would receive the same treatment: “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you...Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...All these things will they do unto you for My Name’s sake, because they know not Him that sent Me” (John 15:18-21). “Ye shall be hated of all men for My Name’s sake...when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another...The disciple is not above his master” (Matt. 10:22-24).

When our Lord was on earth, the persecution was directed at Him primarily. After the Lord left this earth, the persecution was directed at His followers, namely those who were the members of the body of Christ.

One of the greatest lessons Paul ever learned was taught to him on the road to Damascus when Jesus said to him, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” (Acts 9:4). Saul was persecuting believers, members of the body of Christ. And yet, Jesus told Saul that he was persecuting Jesus Christ. How could this be? Paul learned that when the body suffers, the Head feels it. When the Church suffers and is persecuted, Christ shares in this suffering. He feels every pain, every hurt, every affliction of His beloved believers. Paul never forgot this truth.

When Jesus was on earth, He was afflicted and suffered in so many ways. Now that He is gone from earth, the Church, His beloved body and bride, has taken His place, and we fill up or complete the sufferings of Christ as His representatives on earth. God knows all these afflictions and sufferings in advance. We have been appointed unto these afflictions (1 Thess. 3:3; Acts 9:16; 14:22; 20:23-24; Phil. 1:29-30). They are part of God’s plan for our lives. God knows all about them, and He counts them not only as our afflictions but as His own. He shares with us in our afflictions. He suffers with us in our sufferings. There is a sense in which Christ’s sufferings are not complete until they are realized and experienced by His Church, in His will, for His glory.

May this help us to see our sufferings for Christ’s sake in a whole new light!



~*George Zeller*: www.middletonbiblechurch.org