

life groups' sermon guide
the secret to getting rich
colossians 1:24-29



Small groups exist at Kingsway to provide authentic relationships for the life application of the CORE 4 elements of Worship, Grow, Serve, and Share

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church”

Colossians 1:24

Introduction:

Tonight over a hundred grown men will load up with pads and tape, putting their physical well-being on the line in order to win a gaudy ring and a 36-inch trophy. Meanwhile all millions of screaming fans will watch intently, glued to their HD television screens, wearing team paraphernalia and tracking stats online. Oh, the joys of NFL football.

Q :: Why do you think football players put themselves through so much physical punishment and suffering?

Tonight, the Colt’s own Dwight Freeney will attempt to play football with a torn ligament in his right ankle. It’s situations like this, along with broken bones, pierced organs, and most notably concussions, that led *Time Magazine* to run a cover story this week entitled, “The Most Dangerous Game: How to Fix Football.”

I promise we’re going somewhere with this, so humor me for one more question:

Q :: Should the NFL fix football? Can the physical punishment that football entails be fixed? Why or why not?

Going Deeper:

Read Colossians 1:24-29 aloud together

In this text Paul says he not only rejoices in suffering, but that in doing so he is filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions (1:24). This verse has caused a lot of confusion through the centuries. What could Paul possibly mean by this?

Q :: At first glance, what do you think verse 24 means?

To get a grasp on this together, let’s look at the passage backwards.

* [Group leader should let the group attempt their own summaries. Use what is provided as a guide]:¹

¹ The following descriptions come from John Piper’s sermon *Called to Suffer and Rejoice: To Finish the Aim of Christ’s Afflictions* (August 30, 1992). See www.desiringgod.org.

Verse 29 – Paul says that there is a purpose for which he labors. And the striving, the agonizing, of this labor is not merely his own energy. It is the power of Christ mightily working in him.

Verse 28 – describes the purpose that Paul labors for, namely, to present everyone that he reaches "complete in Christ." And he does this by proclaiming Christ, admonishing everyone, and teaching everyone. This is Paul's ceaseless labor, which Christ energizes.

Verse 26-27 – defines more explicitly what Paul proclaims and teaches. It's called a "mystery" in verse 26, not because it can't be understood, but because it has been hidden for ages and has now been revealed to the saints. Then verse 27 describes the riches of the glory of this mystery. It is "Christ in you [Gentiles], the hope of glory." What was not revealed fully in past ages was that the Jewish Messiah—the Christ—would actually reach out to non-Jewish nations and indwell non-Jewish people—that he would actually live in them and give them the promise of Abraham, the hope of glory in the kingdom of God with all the saints. But now the mystery is being revealed and Paul is proclaiming Christ and teaching everywhere that the indwelling of the Messiah and the hope of the glory of God belong to all who trust Christ and really hope in the glory of God (1:4, 23).

Verse 25 – simply says that this proclamation of Christ is the fulfilling of a stewardship that God has given to Paul to spread God's Word. He is a servant of the church and a steward of God. His charge is to take the Word of God to the nations, offer them the hope of glory, and call them to faith. And so he is a minister of the church by gathering God's chosen ones from among the nations, and by teaching and admonishing them so that they can be presented complete in Christ.

Verse 24 – says that this ministry of extending the mystery of Christ and the hope of glory to the nations, and then admonishing and teaching them involves suffering. *"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church"*

The Context Suggests the Meaning

The context that we just looked at suggests that Paul's sufferings fill up Christ's not by adding anything to their worth, but by extending them to the people they were meant to bless. What is lacking in the afflictions of Christ is not that they are deficient in worth or merit, as though they could not sufficiently cover the sins of all who believe. What is lacking is the fact that the infinite value of Christ's afflictions remains unknown to much of the world. They are still a mystery (hidden) to many people and people groups. And God's intention is that the mystery be revealed. So the afflictions are lacking in the sense that Christ's sufferings and the subsequent effects are not seen and known among the nations. In order for them to be known, they must be carried by ministers of the Word, believers in Christ Jesus, Christians. In this way, those who present the Gospel to others "fill up" what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ by extending them to others.

Read Philippians 2:25-30 aloud together

Q :: What similarities do you notice between Philippians 2:30 and Colossians 1:24?

Paul wrote Philippians, as well as Colossians, from prison and apparently the Philippian church had been in the habit of sending resources to Paul (see 4:14-17) through a man named Epaphroditus (4:18). Commenting on Philippians 2:25-30, Marvin Vincent writes, “It [the gift to Paul from the church at Philippi] was a sacrificial offering of love. What was lacking, and what would have been grateful to Paul and the church alike, was the church’s presentation of this offering in person. This was impossible, and Paul represents Epaphroditus as supplying this lack by his affectionate and zealous ministry.”²

**It appears that in both Philippians 2:30 and Colossians 1:24 the “filling up what is lacking” represents the personal presentation of a gift to those who otherwise would not know about it. Paul presented the Gospel to the Gentiles (Colossians 1:25-29) and Epaphroditus presented the church’s gifts to Paul. And in both cases their services involved personal suffering.

Reread Colossians 1:24 & Philippians 2:30 and note the suffering these men went through in order to present their gifts.

Application:

1. In your life, what ways does sharing the Gospel and living for Christ involve or result in personal suffering?
2. As with football, can this suffering be fixed, or is it simply a natural component of evangelism and discipleship?
3. If we try to eliminate suffering [from the life of the church or our individual lives as believers] are we still sharing the Gospel? Or have we settled for a watered-down version of the truth?
4. What ways can God use the sufferings in our lives for His glory?
5. Are there any sufferings in your life today that God can use or is using? Are you “rejoicing” in those sufferings like Paul or bemoaning them?

² Marvin Vincent, “Epistle to the Philippians and to Philemon,” *International Critical Commentary*, p. 78.