

Colossians 1:24-2:7

Notes on the text

All references to the text come from the ESV translation, and that will be the case for the future as well.

1:24 – 2:5

Paul in this section speaks of his ministry, but this is not some form of ego trip. Rather, as Paul speaks of his ministry he points us beyond himself to God and Christ, revealing the truths of God's Word and plan for the world, and showing the end point of a life in Christ.

v24 *"In my flesh...for the sake of his body, that is, the church"*

This is the verse which may cause issues for you in the studies, as people will (rightly) want to know what is meant by **"what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."** Firstly, this does **not** mean that there was anything somehow deficient or unfinished in Jesus' suffering and death. Paul has just spent 23 verses showing the fullness there is in Christ and the certainty of the Colossian's identity in Him, and he has not just forgotten that. This is an important point, as it means that at the most basic level this verse does not change the implications or applications of the passage or the book.

What does it mean though? There has been much discussion about this verse, but here's my shot, for what it's worth. The assumption Paul makes is that there will be suffering, or "affliction" as part of the life of any disciple of Christ. Jesus, who underwent the suffering of the cross, has now been raised and is exalted, and suffers no more. However his body, the church, is still on this earth. Therefore, what is "lacking" is that His death does not mean that Christians will never have to suffer. Yes, we have been perfectly reconciled, and yes, we are no longer alienated and hostile and evil (v21) but we still live in a fallen world and will suffer accordingly. When we read lacking, we think "deficient" in some moral or spiritual way. The language is actually more practical than that. (in Philippians 2:30 the same Greek words are used of Epaphroditus making up for what is lacking (practically) in the Philippians' service of Paul.)

How though is Paul *"filling up"* what is lacking? Paul was a rabbi, a Jewish law-master, and rabbinical thought spoke of the end times as the "afflictions of the Messiah," ie a period of suffering and trial which had to be endured before the Messiah's perfect rule began. Therefore he seems to be saying that as he suffers physically he does so on behalf of God's people, and so "fills up" that measure of suffering to hasten the return of Christ. Another translation of the word "lacking" (Greek *hysterēma*) is "yet to be endured," so the sentence can also be read as "I am filling up what is yet to be endured in Christ's afflictions."

I would really suggest that you don't get into too much detail on this, simply because it does not undermine the person or work of Christ, and therefore does not significantly change the way we are to apply the truths of Paul's ministry. No huge teaching point hangs on these verses, save the insight that believers' in some way share in the suffering of Christ.

Phew! Moving swiftly on...

The Aim of Paul's ministry – v25,26,28,29

Paul is a **minister** (v25) of the church, and his role as such is appointed by God (v25b). His aim is to **make the word of God fully known** (25c), and this is done as he reveals the **mystery** (26,27) that has been hidden. This mystery is the truth that Christ is in the believer (27b), and this fact means they have the certain hope of **glory**, of eternal life (27b). He does this both through his sufferings but primarily through the **proclamation of Christ**, which involves warning and teaching (v28). Notice though that the ultimate aim of this ministry is that everyone who believes is **presented mature in Christ** (v28b).

v27 "To them...the hope of glory"

Paul uses wonderfully rich language to describe this mystery that has been revealed, and sums it up in two phrases; **Christ in you**, and **the hope of glory**. Christ in you carries the weight of a key them in Colossians; the participation of the believer with Christ. If we are in Christ, then he is in us; it does not work any other way. To have Christ in us is to be **reconciled** (v22,) to be **holy and blameless before God** (v22b,) and to live in the light of his lordship. But more than that, it is to have the supreme Lord dwelling *within* us through his Spirit, so that we are enabled to **continue in the faith** (v23) and to **walk in him** (2:6.)

2:1-5

Paul continues on this theme in these verses. Notice how similar the language is to his prayer in 1:9-12. Paul in effect is saying that as he works for these Christians he is part of the answer to his own prayer, as the aim of his work is that people may grown in **love, understanding, knowledge and firmness of faith**.

This section also pre-empts the coming section on warnings against false teaching. Notice again the repeated emphasis on fullness, esp. in v3.

v2 "That their hearts...which is in Christ."

How are Christians to grow to these things, to be mature in Christ? It is that their hearts would be encouraged and **knit together in love**. This phrase means that the hearts of the Christians in these places, and we ourselves, are to be stitched together in love for one another and for Christ. It is striking that as God's word is proclaimed fully, and as Paul struggles, the hearts of the people are knit together in love and so they grow. **Growth therefore is something that we do as a group, not primarily as individuals.**

v3 *“in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”*

Paul echoes the language of 1:15-19. If **all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge** are **hidden in Christ**, then of course the Colossians shouldn't move away from him in their quest for maturity and spiritual knowledge.

v6-7 *“Therefore...abounding in thanksgiving.”*

Therefore: this signals that the Colossians are to change *in view of all that has gone before*. Particularly, in view of the fact that they **received Christ Jesus the Lord**, they are to continue in him in the same manner. Remember here that **Lord** carries with it all the weight and majesty of 1:15-19. In view of that then of course they are to be **rooted, established**, growing and thankful.

This also shows us that the preceding verses, ie 1:24 - 2:5, are for our benefit and application. They are not actually about Paul's ministry; rather, they are about Jesus as seen through Paul's ministry.

The Study

The Big Idea

Paul, as a minister of the Church of Christ, labours and suffers for the sake of Christian people so that they can be presented mature and steadfast in their faith and devotion to Christ, and that their hearts might be encouraged to love one another in view of Jesus' lordship.

Aim of the study: to show us the fullness of God's revelation of Christ, and to show us the end point of following him faithfully, so that we as believers will be encouraged to walk in Him just as we received Him. (v6-7)

Ponder

What motivations do we have to remain steadfast in the Christian life? What might pressure us to abandon the Christian life and to live for some other hope?

Review

What have been the main themes of the letter thus far? How did Paul apply the great truths about the Lordship of Christ? (cf v23)

Big questions for 1:24-29

Why does Paul seemingly move off to the side and talk about his own ministry? In these verses, what is there that actually points beyond Paul and to Jesus?

What is the purpose of Paul's ministry? How does he achieve this?

Application: **What is it that brings Christians to maturity?** Are there any implications from this for our own ministries amongst our friends, whether Christian or non-Christian?

What does it mean to have **"Christ in you, the hope of glory?"** Do people see that hope in us?

Big questions for 2:1-7

What does it mean "knit together in love?" How can we tell if a group of Christians' hearts are knit together like this?

Application: **How should we approach fellow believers, particularly as we hear God's Word and live for his Son?**

What is the follow-on of people's hearts being encouraged and knit together? Why is Christ the key to having the "full assurance of understanding?" (v2)

Application: **What does it mean, in light of what's gone before, to "walk in Christ?"** Do we marvel enough at what it means to be in him, and he in us? How might our loves look if we truly understood and believed these truths?