

COLOSSIANS 1:24-27 | THE PAULINE DISPENSATION

VERSE 24 - BLUE

Paul claims to be enduring "sufferings" for the Colossians. Despite limited evidence, it's generally believed that he wrote this during his Roman imprisonment documented at the end of Acts. We know virtually nothing about Paul's life after the closure of the book of Acts, leaving the nature of these sufferings to speculation. However, Paul has mentioned enduring various trials — emotionally, spiritually, and physically — due to his ministry to gentiles. We can infer that the suffering in verse 24 might coincide with these trials, potentially shifting our chronology and suggesting an earlier epistle. Alternatively, we can assume that Paul's sufferings persisted beyond the Acts record, which is likely a safe assumption.

What is more surprising is that Paul says his sufferings in the flesh "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ." This seems to imply that the sufferings of Christ are not, in themselves, sufficient. However, it's important to clarify that Paul is not suggesting his own sufferings are necessary for any kind of redemptive purpose. The previous verses (20-22) have already established the sufferings of Christ as sufficient to "reconcile all things" (v. 20).

Paul's sufferings are endured for the benefit of the church, not for redemption. Using the metaphor of Christ's body, Paul first referred to "the body of his flesh" (v. 22), and now his suffering in his own flesh is "for his body's sake." In verse 22, Paul mentioned the "corpus christi," whereas now he refers to the theological body of Christ. All "body of Christ" references require scrutiny to see which body is being referred to, physical or spiritual.

In Philippians 1:13, Paul states, "that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places." Here, Paul refers to his imprisonment as his "bonds in Christ," once again linking his personal suffering to his ministry and, by extension, to Christ. This verse further supports the interpretation that Paul's sufferings are not for redemption, but for the purpose of spreading the Gospel and strengthening the church. When Paul speaks about his sufferings filling up Christ's afflictions, it is in this context of shared struggle for the sake of the Gospel, not in terms of redemption.

VERSE 25 - BLUE

Paul identifies himself as a minister of the church, which he metaphorically refers to as the body of Christ: "I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you." The term used for "stewardship" in Greek is "οἰκονομία" (oikonomia), which refers directly to the "law of the house," or more broadly to administration or management.

Paul asserts that a new **OIKONOMIA**, or dispensation, was given to him by God for the sake of the body of Christ. This is a significant claim, and it is crucial to understand what Paul means. He is not merely suggesting that he has been put in charge of existing laws or structures; instead, he argues that a new set of "house laws" or a new "administration" has been handed down to him.

This is not a minor administrative change; it represents a major shift in the understanding and practice of faith. Paul asserts that he has been entrusted with a new paradigm and set of rules governing God's relationship with humanity. This new understanding, or "oikonomia," has been given to him specifically for the benefit of the body of Christ, the collective believers. It underscores the revolutionary nature of Paul's teachings and the radical reorientation he brought to the early Christian community.

Paul's dispensation is not just a new directive, it is a groundbreaking revelation that "fulfills the word of God." Without embracing this Pauline dispensation, one's comprehension of the Bible is fundamentally incomplete, lacking the full

illumination God intended. Therefore, the magnitude and significance of Paul's teachings cannot be overstated; they are an essential pillar in the practice and understanding of Christian faith.

What many Christians often overlook is the profound distinctiveness of Paul's message. While it is widely acknowledged that Paul served as the apostle to the Gentiles, and the full 27 books of the New Testament are accepted, it is often misunderstood that Paul was merely delivering the same message to a different audience. This is not the case.

Paul's message is not simply an extension or replication of the teachings that came before him. Rather, he introduces a fundamentally new message that is unique and distinct from all other teachings in the Bible. This "Pauline dispensation," as it is often called, is not merely a continuation of previous dispensations, such as the dispensation of Moses.

The only continuity that exists is that the Pauline dispensation is built upon the work of Christ, which took place during the Moses dispensation. Beyond this, there is a clear demarcation. The Pauline dispensation introduces a new "house law" or "administration," a new understanding of God's relationship with humanity, and a new practice of faith.

Thus, understanding the uniqueness and significance of the Pauline dispensation is crucial in fully grasping the teachings of the Bible. It is not merely a part of the broader narrative, but a revolutionary shift that illuminates a new path in the practice and understanding of Christian faith.

It is fundamentally shocking and profoundly disturbing that such a crucial aspect of Christian faith is so poorly understood by many believers. This is not due to a lack of intelligence or diligence on their part, but rather a misrepresentation and misinterpretation perpetuated by modern translations of the scripture.

These translations, it seems, have thrown all principles of translation to the wind, manipulating the original text to fit into a more palatable, less challenging narrative. They have done a disservice to the faithful by obscuring the true meaning of this scripture.

The Greek phrase is clear: "to fulfill the word of God." Yet, the New American Standard Bible (NASB) twists this into "so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God." The English Standard Version (ESV) veers off course, stating that the dispensation is so that Paul might "make the word of God fully known". The New International Version (NIV) also strays, proclaiming that the purpose is "to present the word of God in its fullness."

Each of these translations (NASB, ESV, and NIV) have injected their own theological interpretations into the scripture. They have made a reprehensible attempt to mold the phrase "to fulfill" into an issue of proclamation, rather than a matter of content. This is a disgraceful deviation from the original text, as they have bent the words of the scripture to fit their own preconceived notions, rather than faithfully translating the original meaning.

The New English Translation (NET) Bible correctly translates the phrase as "to complete the word of God," but then adds a telling footnote. The footnote reads, "The idea here seems to be that the apostle wants to 'complete the word of God' in that he wants to preach it to every person in the known world (cf. Rom 15:19). See P. T. O'Brien, Colossians, Philemon (WBC), 82."¹ Note the phrase "seems to be." Why would the translators of the NASB, ESV, NIV and virtually all other translations take that which "seems to be" and make it the translation of what they call the word of God?

This is an egregious violation of the principles of translation. It is not only an affront to the faithfulness of translation, but also a disservice to the believers who rely on these translations to understand their faith. It is a flagrant act of distortion and manipulation of scripture that is simply inexcusable and shameful.

¹ The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible (Biblical Studies Press, 2005).

Why this deviation from the original text? We can see that the same Greek verb "to fulfill" is used in the same form and similar grammatical structure in Matthew 3:15 and 5:17. Yet, there is no attempt by the NASB, ESV, or NIV to twist the meanings of these verses. Why, then, is it done in this context?

This is not a matter of textual variant, but rather a clear case of deviant translation, a deliberate attempt to conceal the truth that the Pauline dispensation is unique and fundamental to a correct understanding of Christianity. The motivations behind this are unclear, but the result is a grave distortion of Christian faith. This is not simply a minor discrepancy; it is an affront to the veracity of the scripture and a stumbling block to believers seeking to understand their faith.

VERSE 26 - BLUE

In verse 26, Paul characterizes the dispensation given to him as "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations." This statement is often met with skepticism within broader Christianity, as many refuse to acknowledge that Paul was imparted with unique, previously unrevealed information. The idea of salvation by grace through faith for all people is seen by many as a longstanding tenet of God's work, which poses a contradiction if it is also labeled as a 'hidden mystery'. As such, this verse is often misinterpreted or overlooked in mainstream Christian teachings.

Only a subset of Christians, often referred to as 'Pauline' believers or 'right dividers', frequently use the terms 'mystery' or 'mystery dispensation'. These groups recognize the unique nature of Paul's teachings and understand that the 'mystery' he refers to is the new covenant of grace given to him by God. They believe that this 'mystery' was not known to previous generations or ages, and it is only through Paul that this new dispensation has been revealed. They argue that acknowledging the distinctiveness and the revolutionary nature of the Pauline dispensation is essential for a complete understanding of the Christian faith.

In the continuation of verse 26, Paul reveals that the hidden mystery "now is made manifest to his saints." It is significant to note that Paul previously claimed that the mystery was given to him (v. 25). Therefore, the manifestation of the mystery to the saints must have been facilitated by Paul. As we learn from the books of Acts and Galatians, after receiving the mystery from God, Paul discreetly and secretly approached the pillars of the church at that time to share with them this divine revelation. They received him well, although Paul was not certain this would be the case. Hence, the revelation to the saints comes directly from Paul. In fact, there is no biblical evidence to suggest otherwise. This further underscores the exclusive and transformative nature of the Pauline dispensation.

It is my position that the "saints" Paul refers to are the Jewish Messianic believers. This interpretation will be further strengthened in the next verse.

VERSE 27 - BLUE

In this verse, Paul states that it was God's will to reveal to the saints "the riches of the glory of this mystery." These 'riches' are situated among the Gentiles, and are a significant blessing to them. In essence, Paul's role was to communicate and express to the saints the work of God among the Gentiles, and the profound blessing that this represented for the Gentiles. It is worth noting that the notion of revealing "to the saints what was taking place among the Gentiles" would not make sense if the 'saints' were the Gentiles themselves. The only interpretation for someone with such an understanding of 'saints' is to perceive 'Gentiles' as non-believers, which is fundamentally nonsensical. Thus, it is clear that the 'saints' referred to are the Jewish Messianic believers, and the 'mystery' revealed among the Gentiles is the new dispensation of grace.

The "mystery among the Gentiles" is then defined as "Christ in you, the hope of glory." It's important to remember that "you" is plural, meaning this isn't about "Christ in your individual life," which would be conveyed as "Christ in thee." There are a couple of ways to interpret this:

1. "Christ in you saints" - However, this wouldn't be a significant mystery revealed, nor would it represent much in terms of riches for the Gentiles.
2. "Christ in you Gentiles" - This would be a new development, as Christ was previously a minister to the circumcision (Romans 15:8) and forbade ministry among the Gentiles (Matthew 10:5-6). Therefore, "Christ in you Gentiles" is indeed a new concept, and it's the information that Paul is communicating, both to the saints and to the Gentiles.

It's worth highlighting the marginal note on the word "in" in the King James Version of the Bible, which suggests an alternative translation: "amongst you." This subtle difference can change our understanding of the phrase "Christ in you." Instead of suggesting a personal, internal presence of Christ in each believer, "Christ amongst you" speaks to the spiritual presence of Christ among the community of Gentile believers. This presence of Christ among the Gentiles is central to the mystery revealed to Paul. It represents a drastic shift from the previously held position that Christ's ministry was for the Jews. This is a key aspect of the new dispensation that Paul is communicating to both the Jewish believers ('the saints') and the Gentiles.