

Church Hurt

Colossians 1:24-26

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I. Hurt for the People v. 24

- a. Rejoice - **to be in a state of happiness and well-being, rejoice, be glad**
 - i. The deep-rooted joy of the Christian is not abated when the circumstances of daily life are adverse. Joy is experienced in suffering and even persecution. This was the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:11–12) and the experience of the early Church (Acts 5:41; cf. 1 Thess 1:6).
 - ii. Paul exemplified this possibility of joy in suffering in his own life (2 Cor 7:4; Col 1:24) and encouraged his churches to follow suit (Phil 2:17–18).
 - iii. It is a matter of more than mood. In 1 Th. 3:9, with a play on εὐχαριστέω, joy is in God, and in Phil. 3:1; 4:4, 10
 - iv. In the *parousia* the community will be manifested as the apostle's work, 1 Th. 2:19, cf. Phil. 4:1.
 - v. The initial statement echoes a characteristic Pauline theme, that of rejoicing in suffering (Rom. 5:3—boasting in afflictions [cf. 12:12]; 8:18—sufferings not worth comparison with the coming glory [similarly 2 Cor. 4:17–18]; 2 Cor. 1:5–7—abundance of sufferings matched by abundance of comfort; 2 Cor. 7:4—"I am overflowing with joy in our affliction"; 1 Thes. 1:6
 - vi. God told Ananias that Paul would learn how many things he must suffer for Christ's sake (Acts 9:16). From the beginning of his ministry, Paul and others knew that unique suffering would be his lot
- b. Suffering-
 - i. **endured, suffering, misfortune**
 - ii. for Paul and his congregations the presupposition for the fact that suffering is normal
Afflictions here are those which necessarily arise from the antithesis between the Christ
 - iii. As these texts show, such suffering is characteristic of apostolic ministry (also 1 Cor. 4:9–13; 2 Cor. 11:23–27; Gal. 6:17),
 - iv. Suffering were accepted, indeed welcomed, as the unavoidable consequence of the all-important objective of preaching the gospel. What the sufferings in view here might have involved is documented in 2 Cor. 11:23–28.

- v. Paul suffered in two ways. He suffered the attacks of those he sought to reach with the gospel, and he suffered at the hands of the Jews who sought to stop the advance of the gospel. His suffering related to the Colossians in that his personal difficulties came because of his attempts to convince the Jews to accept the Gentile believers
- c. Suffer for You
 - i. Your Sake - dying, devoting oneself
 - 1. In My Flesh
- d. Suffer For Christ
 - i. I am supplanting
 - 1. **take one's turn in filling up**
 - 2. here is the thought of vicarious filling up with reference to the measure of eschatological affliction laid on the community in the non-mystical but soberly realistic fellowship of its destiny with Christ
 - 3. For Paul suffering meant suffering with Christ, sharing Christ's sufferings (Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:5; 4:10–11; Phil. 3:10–11).
 - 4. Second, Jesus' afflictions became Paul's sufferings. Paul carefully distinguished between the two. He suffered in his body ("in my flesh"), and there was a real struggle. The text reveals some parallels between Jesus and Paul. Both suffered in the flesh; both suffered vicariously; both suffered for the gospel; and both suffered for the church
 - ii. What is lacking
 - 1. **the lack of what is needed or desirable, freq. in contrast to abundance**
 - iii. Christ's affliction
 - 1. **Afflictions - trouble that inflicts distress, *oppression, affliction, tribulation***
- e. Suffer for the Church
 - i. **a unified group of people, *body***
 - ii. When Paul emphasizes so strongly the fact that the body is to be dedicated to service and is thus the place where faith takes place in encounter with others. This is confirmed by Col. 1:22 (cf. Eph. 2:13 f. 16?), where $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ is the crucified body, though nearby in 1:18, 24 it means the community,
 - iii. These Messianic Age sufferings are both personal, for Paul, and corporate, for the entire church. The word implies a vicarious element to these afflictions
 - 1. Church - **the global community of Christians, (*universal*) church**
 - 2. He planted churches in Gentile, pagan territory, and that brought reactions from Jews and Gentiles alike

II. Hurt to Serve v. 25

- a. Minister - **one who serves as an intermediary in a transaction, agent, intermediary, courier**
 - i. **Minister** - which would require οὖν or the like, but refers to present time. Now as a prisoner “with a chain upon my wrist” . His active service as δῖάκονος is at present suspended, but the sufferings which it had brought upon him are a source of joy.
 - ii. Of this church
- b. Commissioned - **responsibility of management, management** of a household, *direction, office*
 - i. Paul applies the idea of administration to the office of an apostle *according to the divine office which has been granted to me for you*
 - ii. For your Benefit- of actions or feelings directed in someone’s direction in hostile or friendly
 - iii. But Paul applied the language to his own work: he saw himself as commissioned by his master, like a good steward having received his orders for the master’s absence; hence 1 Cor. 9:17, and cf. Eph. 3:2

III. Hurt to Finish v. 25 b-26

- a. Carry – **to bring to completion that which was already begun, complete, finish**
- b. Mystery
 - i. Mystery
 1. A *secret* or *mystery*, too profound for human ingenuity, is God’s reason for the partial hardening of Israel’s heart **Ro 11:25** or the transformation of the surviving Christians at the Parousia **1 Cor 15:51**.
 2. The term μυστήριον heightens still further the already eschatological and apocalyptic sense of being privileged to see the whole sweep of human history from God’s standpoint
 3. Part of God’s purpose was to form a body of believers, reconciled to himself and to each other through the cross (Eph 2:14–18). In this body, Jewish and gentile believers have been made “members together of one body and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus,” a new phase of God’s revealed plan, which Paul here calls a “mystery” (3:6). As noted above, Paul himself has a responsibility to minister the truth of this “mystery” faithfully (v 2–5; cf. 1 Cor 4:1–5).
 4. Colossians continues to show Paul’s sense of responsibility regarding this “mystery,” which is now identified with the “word of God” (1:25–29)

5. The Colossian believers are asked to pray for Paul as he preaches this “mystery” (4:3).
- ii. Hidden
 1. In what sense was Paul’s suffering for the church, particularly the Colossian church which Paul had never seen? Colossians 1:25ff. explains the unique theological insights God gave Paul. He preached a message of inclusion: Gentiles were included in the work of God
 2. Even Christ, who was understood by so few, is *God’s secret or mystery Col 2:2*, hidden ages ago **1:26** , but now gloriously revealed among the gentiles vs. **27**, to whom the *secret of Christ*, his relevance for them, is proclaimed, **4:3**
 - iii. Past ages and generations
- c. Revealed

Background

Why start the letter with joy for suffering

Why did Paul write? False teachers threatened to undermine what Epaphras had taught. More disconcertingly, the implications of their teaching threatened to remove the church from its strong Christian foundation. Since Paul saw himself as the apostle responsible for the well-being of the church, he thought it imperative to respond to the teaching personally. The nature of the teaching is discussed later under the heading “The Problem at Colossae,” and that section should be consulted regarding this matter.

Why did Paul write when he did? Three of the Prison Epistles belong together: Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon. Paul wrote Philemon, urging him to forgive and restore his runaway slave, Onesimus. Significantly, Onesimus and Tychicus traveled together to Colossae with news of Paul’s situation, and they carried the letter Paul wrote. Piecing this information together, the following scenario best explains the immediate occasion.

Sometime during Paul’s imprisonment, he met the runaway slave Onesimus. Suggestions that Onesimus sought out Paul do not fit the data. It seems highly unlikely that Onesimus had run away as a Christian, and Paul stated in Phlm 10 that he became a son in prison.¹¹⁰ Because of this new commitment to Christ, Paul encouraged Onesimus to return to Philemon. Generally,

¹¹⁰ Paul likely would not have appealed to Philemon if he were a harsh master; and, if Onesimus had a history of fickle Christian commitment, Paul likely would not have put his reputation on the line for him. The tone of the situation suggests that Paul and Onesimus met in prison.

such a decision came with great anxiety and an urgent need to settle the matter, and Onesimus no doubt felt that way. Therefore, at the earliest convenience, Paul sent Onesimus to Philemon with the letter. Philemon probably belonged to the church at Colossae, and Paul took advantage of the situation to address his other concern: the problem which Epaphras had discussed with him. Epaphras had earlier journeyed to Paul to help him in whatever way he could, representing the three churches of the Lycus valley.¹²¹ Further, since Onesimus and Tychicus had to travel through Ephesus to get to Colossae, Paul took advantage of the occasion to write to his good friends at Ephesus. This suggests that the problem at Colossae did not require an emergency response from Paul. At least equally pressing was Paul's desire for Christian restitution between Onesimus and Philemon.³

The previous survey reveals that the theological passage divides into two areas: soteriology (2:9–15) and sanctification (2:16–19). The soteriological section contains two matters: “angel worship” (2:9–10, 15) and “asceticism” (2:11–14). The two receive almost equal emphasis. Syntactically, the outside members of a chiasm receive primary emphasis. On one hand, Paul concerned himself more with the cosmic Christ, a seeming fascination of the Colossians. On the other hand, the ascetic problem occupied more space in the text.

In dealing with this issue, Paul confronted two typically Jewish problems which plagued the church. Fascination with supernatural beings characterized many groups of Jews from the time of Daniel through the Intertestamental Period.⁵⁴⁵ This specific infatuation was needless. In his work, Jesus dominated them. He created them (he is their head, 2:9–10; see also the hymn to Christ of 1:15–20). When many rebelled, for Paul focused here on the evil supernatural beings, Jesus conquered them, embarrassing and exposing them publicly (2:15). They deserved *no* following.

The other Jewish problem stems from the heart of Jewish life. In vv. 11–14 Paul addressed circumcision and the law. Perhaps these represent the entire system since in Rom 2:17–29 these two focal points characterize Judaism (the law in vv. 17–24; circumcision in vv. 25–29). Circumcision was no longer necessary. Spiritual circumcision, the more important matter (cf. Rom 2:29), occurred at baptism when one identified with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (see Col 2:11–12 where syntactically being buried and being raised explain baptism). Physical circumcision introduced one to the spiritual blessings of Israel and to the requirements of the law. Here Paul argued that *neither* circumcision *nor* the requirements of the law continue in effect.⁵

²¹¹ The text contains no hint that Epaphras did not know how to respond to the heresy or that he came to Paul seeking help and counsel in the matter. Col 4:13 suggests that he was sent by the churches as an act of good will from them to Paul.

³ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 164–165.

⁴⁵⁵ Of course, these references may refer to the Hellenistic speculation about the supernatural. The point is that there is no reason why this cannot be considered natural to Judaism.

⁵ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 180.

Colossians was written from Rome during Paul's (first) imprisonment there, as recorded in Acts 28:30. At the same time Paul wrote Ephesians and Philemon (ca⁶. A.D. 60–62). In Philemon 1:9 Paul referred to himself as “a prisoner of Christ Jesus.” Ephesians also contains references to Paul being a “prisoner” (Eph. 3:1; 4:1). And Ephesians refers to Tychicus carrying the epistles from Paul to their destinations (Eph. 6:21; cf. Col. 4:7). Since the record of Acts ends around A.D. 60–62, Colossians was probably written during this two-year imprisonment. And since neither Colossians, Ephesians, nor Philemon mention the outcome of Paul's trial, anticipated in Philippians 1:19–21, it can be assumed that Colossians was written before Philippians⁷

The circumstance which prompted the writing of Colossians seemed to be the special heresy that arose there. This false teaching seemed to be the beginning of what later (in the second century) developed into Gnosticism. It contained several characteristics. (1) It was Jewish, stressing the need for observing Old Testament laws and ceremonies. (2) It was philosophical, laying emphasis on some special or deeper knowledge (*gnōsis*). (3) It involved the worship of angels as mediators to God (2:18). (4) It was exclusivistic, stressing the special privilege and “perfection” of those select few who belonged to this philosophical elite. (5) It was also Christological. But this seminal Gnosticism denied the deity of Christ, thus calling forth one of the greatest declarations of Christ's deity found anywhere in Scripture (1:15–16; 2:9).⁸

Word Studies

Rejoice – **to be in a state of happiness and well-being, rejoice, be glad**⁹

The deep-rooted joy of the Christian is not abated when the circumstances of daily life are adverse. Joy is experienced in suffering and even persecution. This was the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:11–12) and the experience of the early Church (Acts 5:41; cf. 1 Thess 1:6). Paul exemplified this possibility of joy in suffering in his own life (2 Cor 7:4; Col 1:24) and encouraged his churches to follow suit (Phil 2:17–18). Suffering is prominent in the background to the statements concerning joy in 1 Peter

⁶ca. *circa*, about

⁷ Norman L. Geisler, “[Colossians.](#)” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 667.

⁸ Norman L. Geisler, “[Colossians.](#)” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 668.

⁹ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1074.

and Hebrews. Eschatological anticipation, however, provided incentive for rejoicing even when one's personal property was plundered (Heb 10:34) or when one faced persecution (1 Pet 4:13). The early Church looked forward to the second advent of Christ as a time of joy (Matt 25:21, 23). The ultimate triumph of God and "the marriage of the Lamb" will consummate the joy of God and all his people (Rev 19:7) and result in cries of "Hallelujah!" (Rev 19:1, 3, 4, 6).¹⁰

Joy is an essential factor in the relation between apostle and community. Paul asks the Roman church to pray that he might come with joy, R. 15:32. Joy is reciprocal, Phil. 2:28 f.; 2 C. 2:3 in contrast to λύπη. It is a matter of more than mood. In 1 Th. 3:9, with a play on εὐχαριστέω, joy is in God, and in Phil. 3:1; 4:4, 10, with the formula ἐν κυρίῳ, which has ecclesiological significance, it is in the Lord. Joy in the relation between apostle and community is eschatological. In the *parousia* the community will be manifested as the apostle's work, 1 Th. 2:19, cf. Phil. 4:1. The same thought stands behind the prologue to Phil. In Phil. 2:17 f. we find συγχαίρω alongside the simple χαίρω; this reflects the mutuality → lines 21 ff¹¹

Suffering - **that which is suffered or endured, suffering, misfortune**¹²

for Paul and his congregations the presupposition for the fact that suffering is normal and that the absence of it is to be regarded as ὑστερήματα, Col. 1:24. ἀνταναπληρώω thus means the elimination of this deficiency by the presence of sufferings. In spite of the severity of afflictions R. 8:18 is true: ὅτι οὐκ ἄξια τὰ παθήματα τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ πρὸς τὴν μέλλουσαν δόξαν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι εἰς ἡμᾶς. The concept ὁ νῦν καιρὸς is synonym¹³. with ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος, → I, 205, 40 f.; 206, 25 ff. Afflictions here are those which necessarily arise from the antithesis between the Christ event and the nature of this aeon. Hence the παθήματα τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ are no different from the παθήματα or θλίψεις τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 2 C. 1:5; Col. 1:24¹⁴

¹⁰ Clinton E. Arnold, "[Joy](#)," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1023.

¹¹ Hans Conzelmann and Walther Zimmerli, "[Χαίρω, Χαρά, Συγχαίρω, Χάρις, Χαρίζομαι, Χαριτόω, Ἀχάριστος, Χάρισμα, Εὐχαριστέω, Εὐχαριστία, Εὐχάριστος.](#)" ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 369.

¹² William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 747.

¹³synon. synonym.

¹⁴ Wilhelm Michaelis, "[Πάσχω, Παθητός, Προπάσχω, Συμπάσχω, Πάθος, Πάθημα, Συμπαθής, Συμπαθέω, Κακοπαθέω, Συγκακοπαθέω, Κακοπάθεια, Μετριοπαθέω, Ομοιοπαθής.](#)" ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 934.

Sake - after expressions of suffering, dying, devoting oneself¹⁵

Supplementing - **take one's turn in filling up**¹⁶ The only N¹⁷T instance is at Col. 1:24. Predominant here is the thought of vicarious filling up with reference to the measure¹⁸² of eschatological affliction laid on the community in the non-mystical but soberly realistic fellowship of its destiny with Christ (τῶν θλίψεων¹⁹³ τοῦ Χριστοῦ → III, 143 f.) on the basis of its dying with Him²⁰

Lacking - **the lack of what is needed or desirable, freq²¹. in contrast to abundance**²²

Afflictions - trouble that inflicts distress, oppression, affliction, tribulation²³

Body - a unified group of people, body²⁴ When Paul emphasises so strongly the fact that the body is to be dedicated to service and is thus the place where faith takes place in encounter with others, this is probably influenced in part by the development of the eucharistic liturgy (→ 1059, 1 ff.) in which σῶμα as a parallel of αἷμα is increasingly understood as the body of Jesus offered up for men on the cross. This is how τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ is to be taken in R. 7:4,⁴¹²⁵⁴

¹⁵ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1030.

¹⁶ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 87.

¹⁷NT New Testament.

¹⁸² → ὑστέρημα; Loh. Kol., 78 refers to the background of apocalyptic ideas in Judaism and the NT, cf. Str.-B., IV, 977–985.

¹⁹³ θλίψις is never used in the NT for Jesus' own sufferings; it always refers to afflictions which result from union with Him.

²⁰ Gerhard Delling, "[Πλήρης. Πληρώω. Πλήρωμα. Αναπληρώω. Ανταναπληρώω. Εκπληρώω. Εκπλήρωσις. Συμπληρώω. Πληροφορέω. Πληροφορία.](#)" ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 307.

²¹freq. freq. = frequent(ly)

²² William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1044.

²³ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 457.

²⁴ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 984.

²⁵⁴¹⁴ With Mi. R., Kuss, *op. cit., ad loc.*; Best, 52 f. Gl. 2:19 f. esp. supports this: He who is crucified with Christ is dead to the Law, cf. also Gl. 4:4 f.; for acc. to Gl. 3:13 the curse of the Law reached its climax at the cross. R. 8:8 f. also rests on 8:3f. (→ 133, 24 ff.; VI, 429, n. 642), as does 7:5 (→ 134, 26 ff.) on 7:4. A. Schweitzer, *Die Mystik d. Ap. Pls.* (1930), 186, n. 1 relates it to the community into which believers are incorporated, cf.

the only verse in these epistles in which this concept occurs in set form outside the eucharistic passages.⁴¹²⁶⁵ This is confirmed by Col. 1:22 (cf. Eph. 2:13 f. 16?), where σῶμα is the crucified body, though nearby in 1:18, 24 it means the community,²⁷

Church - **the global community of Christians, (universal) church**²⁸

Minister - **one who serves as an intermediary in a transaction, agent, intermediary, courier**²⁹

Commissioned - **responsibility of management, management** of a household, *direction, office*³⁰
Paul applies the idea of administration to the office of an apostle³¹ *according to the divine office which has been granted to me for you*³²

Benefit - of actions or feelings directed in someone's direction in hostile or friendly³³

Mystery - The Pauline lit³⁴. has μ. in 21 places.

- A *secret* or *mystery*, too profound for human ingenuity, is God's reason for the partial hardening of Israel's heart **Ro 11:25** or the transformation of the surviving Christians at the Parousia **1 Cor 15:51**.

Meuzelaar, 57 f. But "through the community" is impossible in this context. For other champions of these interpretations cf. E. Schweizer, *Gemeinde u. Gemeindeordnung im NT* (1959), 83, n. 357.

²⁶⁴¹⁵ W. Hahn, *Gottesdienst u. Opfer Christi* (1951), 51–73 finds the origin of the body of Christ concept in the Lord's saying about the destruction and rebuilding of the temple (→ 1058, 1 f.), but cf. Kearns, 90, 5; the eucharistic sayings were decisive in relation to its development. Kearns, too, stresses R. 7:4. Cf. also the emphasis on the crucified body of Jesus in K. Barth, *K. D.*, IV, 1 (1953), 740 f. (*C. D.*, IV, 1 [1956], 662 ff.).

²⁷ Eduard Schweizer, "*Σῶμα. Σωματικός. Σύσσωμος.*" ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 1067.

²⁸ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 304.

²⁹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 230.

³⁰ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 697.

³¹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 697.

³² William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 697.

³³ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 290.

³⁴lit. **lit.** = literal(ly); literature (references to [scholarly] literature)

- Even Christ, who was understood by so few, is *God's secret* or *mystery* **Col 2:2**, hidden ages ago **1:26** (cp³⁵. Herm. Wr³⁶. 1, 16 ΤΟΥΤΟ ἔΣΤΙ Τὸ ΚΕΚΡΥΜΜΈΝΟΝ ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΜΈΧΡΙ ΤῆΣΔΕ ΤῆΣ ἡΜΈΡΑΣ), but now gloriously revealed among the gentiles vs. **27**, to whom the *secret of Christ*, i.e.³⁷. his relevance for them, is proclaimed, **4:3** (CMitton, E³⁸T 60, '48/49, 320f).³⁹

Part of God's purpose was to form a body of believers, reconciled to himself and to each other through the cross (Eph 2:14–18). In this body, Jewish and gentile believers have been made “members together of one body and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus,” a new phase of God's revealed plan, which Paul here calls a “mystery” (3:6). As noted above, Paul himself has a responsibility to minister the truth of this “mystery” faithfully (v⁴⁰v 2–5; cf⁴¹. 1 Cor 4:1–5).

Colossians continues to show Paul's sense of responsibility regarding this “mystery,” which is now identified with the “word of God” (1:25–29). Once again there is the idea of the span of history linked with the mystery that is known only by revelation, “the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints” (v⁴²v 26). As in Ephesians, the church is the locus for the working out of God's mystery, “which is Christ in you [i.e.⁴³., among you believers], the hope of glory” (v⁴⁴v 27). This Christ is proclaimed v 2, p 1514 p 1514 in wisdom, so that believers may reach mature completion in him (v⁴⁵v 28). The Colossian believers are asked to pray for Paul as he preaches this “mystery” (4:3).⁴⁶

Commentary Studies

1:24 The first aspect of Paul's ministry involved suffering. Perhaps Paul reflected here on the words of explanation at his conversion experience. God told Ananias that Paul would learn how many things he must suffer for Christ's sake (Acts 9:16). From the beginning of his ministry, Paul

³⁵cp. **cp.** = compare, freq. in ref. to citation fr. ancient texts

³⁶Herm. Wr. **Herm. Wr.** = Hermetic Writings—List 5

³⁷i.e. **i.e.** = id est (that is)

I.-E. Indo-European

³⁸ET **ET** = Expository Times—List 6

³⁹William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 662.

⁴⁰v_v verses

⁴¹cf. compare

⁴²v verse

⁴³i.e. that is

⁴⁴v verse

⁴⁵v verse

⁴⁶Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, [*“Mystery,” Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1513–1514.

and others knew that unique suffering would be his lot. That knowledge came through direct revelation from God. Perhaps, further, Paul reflected on the fulfillment of that prediction in the various experiences of suffering in his ministry. Even at the time of writing, Paul was suffering in house arrest for the sake of Gentile churches. In a unique way, the apostle was granted the privilege of suffering for the Messiah.

Suffering for the Colossians. Paul suffered because of the specific ministry God called him to do. He planted churches in Gentile, pagan territory, and that brought reactions from Jews and Gentiles alike. Three terms explain Paul's suffering for them. In v. 24 he used the phrases "for you," "for the sake of his body," and "which is the church." In what sense was Paul's suffering for the church, particularly the Colossian church which Paul had never seen? Colossians 1:25ff. explains the unique theological insights God gave Paul. He preached a message of inclusion: Gentiles were included in the work of God. This meant that the Christ could be—indeed was—resident among the Gentiles. The message was broadly messianic and offended many Jews who did not want the blessings of the messianic kingdom to go to Gentiles. It also caused a reaction among Gentiles who saw a threat to their religious practices and economic livelihood.¹³⁴⁷⁸ Paul suffered in two ways. He suffered the attacks of those he sought to reach with the gospel, and he suffered at the hands of the Jews who sought to stop the advance of the gospel. His suffering related to the Colossians in that his personal difficulties came because of his attempts to convince the Jews to accept the Gentile believers. Details of that interpretation await the section on Paul fulfilling the word of God.

Suffering for the Christ. This passage contains a unique teaching about suffering. Paul stated that his call involved "filling up ... Christ's afflictions" (NASB). The statement has produced thousands of pages of discussion and many theological interpretations. Only an overview can be provided at this point.

Paul used an unusual term for "fill up," occurring only here in all of Scripture. The basic root means "to fill," as to fill in substance or content. The preposition "again" (*ana*) is prefixed to the root, and another Greek preposition, "in place of" (*anti*), is added to it. Together, the word literally conveys the idea of "completing in place of" or "complete for someone else."¹³⁴⁸⁹ The word seems to demand the ideas of exchange or vicariousness and repetition.

Many suggestions have been made as to the meaning of Paul's expression.¹⁴⁴⁹⁰ They may be divided into three categories based on whether the interpreter understood the sufferings as atoning, mystical, or eschatological. First, some may read the passage and assume that Paul meant that Christians must suffer to accomplish their own atonement.¹⁴⁵⁰¹ While not denying

⁴⁷¹³⁸ Frequently the temples were major sources of income for a community. E.g., in Acts 19:17–41 the gospel produced a riot for these reasons.

⁴⁸¹³⁹ BAGD, 72–73.

⁴⁹¹⁴⁰ The most helpful history of interpretation is by J. Kremer, *Was an den Leiden Christi noch mangelt, Eine interpretationsgeschichtliche und exegetische Untersuchung zu Kol, 1, 24b*, BBB 12 (Bonn: Hanstein, 1956), 5–154. Interestingly, Hendriksen provided a good survey of several current possibilities but omitted some of the more recent and likely interpretations (*Colossians*, 91–98).

⁵⁰¹⁴¹ This view was held by H. Windisch, *Paulus und Christus: Ein biblisch-religionsgeschichtlicher Vergleich*, UNT 24 (Leipzig: Heinrich, 1934), 236–50.

the atoning work of Christ, this view depreciates it by suggesting that the work of Christ was insufficient and that believers must contribute to their own salvation. Paul specifically countered both of these in Col 2. As Lohse states: "Paul and all other witnesses in the New Testament unanimously agree that the reconciliation was truly and validly accomplished in the death of Christ, and that no need exists for any supplementation."¹⁴⁵¹²

Two other commonly accepted interpretations are mystical, building on the "in Christ" theme so prominent in Paul. The first builds upon the identity between Paul and Christ. The church and Christ exist in a closely personal relationship so that what one endures the other endures. Advocates say that the apostle, reflecting on his identification with Christ, spoke of participation in Christ's sufferings.¹⁴⁵²³ Two major problems occur between this interpretation and the context of Colossians. First, Paul distinguished himself from Christ and Christ's work. He called himself a servant rather than an equal. Second, the question of the lack of Christ's sufferings remains. In what sense would there be any lack in what Christ did? This mystical interpretation fails to satisfy the details of the text.

A second mystical interpretation builds on the relationship between Christ and the Christian in the Christian's sufferings. Support for this interpretation occurs in the statement of the risen Lord in Acts 9:4, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Obviously Saul thought he persecuted misguided people, particularly Jews, but the Lord took it personally. Paul actually persecuted Christ.¹⁴⁵³⁴ This interpretation comes nearer to the point of the passage, but it also seems inadequate. It does have the advantage of moving from the idea of redemptive suffering which the others contain incorrectly.

The most fruitful route of interpretation considers the Jewish apocalyptic setting of Paul's ministry and is eschatological. This section of the epistle particularly reflects a Jewish eschatological orientation by using such terms as "mystery" (1:26, 27; 2:2), "kingdom" (1:13), and "tribulation" or "affliction" (1:24, NIV). The Jews expected the Messiah's coming to be preceded by a time of tribulation, but the time of tribulation had fixed limits (Mark 13:19–20). The kingdom could be entered only through tribulations (Acts 14:22), which would give way to the glory that would follow. Since in this passage Paul used the term "tribulations" of the Christ rather than "sufferings" ("afflictions," NIV), he wrote in an eschatological framework. It is significant that the word "tribulations" is never used of Christ's redemptive work. Instead the word regularly used is "suffering."¹⁴⁵⁴⁵ Further, in this interpretation the phrase "the Christ" has its full messianic significance. It is not simply an alternate designation for Jesus.¹⁴⁵⁵⁶ The eschatological context, the choice of the word "tribulations," and the article with Christ all point to a time of tribulations associated with the Messiah.

⁵¹¹⁴² Lohse, 69

⁵²¹⁴³ E.g., A. Deissman, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, trans. W. E. Wilson (London: Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., 1926), 162ff. in various places. Some support may come from Matt 20:23: "You will drink my cup."

⁵³¹⁴⁴ This must mean, of course, that Christ lives in

⁵⁴¹⁴⁵ The Greek word "sufferings" (πάθημα) gave rise to the English word "passion."

⁵⁵¹⁴⁶ The article with the word "Christ" is significant here in this regard, especially in an eschatological and messianic context. Paul emphasized it was tribulations of *the* Christ.

These Messianic Age sufferings are both personal, for Paul, and corporate, for the entire church. The word implies a vicarious element to these afflictions. Some become sidetracked in their thinking, focusing on the statement that these are “Christ’s afflictions.” They identify them with the cross. However, that interpretation finds no support in this passage or elsewhere. The substitutionary element is explained in the remainder of v. 24, where Paul stated that they are “for the sake of his body, which is the church.” Thus the afflictions are neither for Jesus nor for Paul and his salvation. They are related to the church. Paul’s afflictions were endured for the sake of the gospel to the Gentiles. They were a part of the reaction of unsympathetic hearers—Jews and Gentiles—to the message of the gospel.

The context contains two other ideas. First, the afflictions of Christ had a lack. The word “lack” suggests that Paul thought of a fixed number of tribulations, some of which remained unfulfilled.¹⁴⁵⁶⁷ Perhaps Paul meant that the inauguration of the age of salvation could not be completed until the universal implications of the gospel appeared. All those who contributed to that understanding suffered (e.g., Stephen), and Paul suffered uniquely because he was the apostle to the Gentiles. In a real sense, then, when his work was completed, the implications of the gospel as a message for all people would be clearly known.

Second, Jesus’ afflictions became Paul’s sufferings. Paul carefully distinguished between the two. He suffered in his body (“in my flesh”), and there was a real struggle. The text reveals some parallels between Jesus and Paul. Both suffered in the flesh; both suffered vicariously; both suffered for the gospel; and both suffered for the church. Many differences between them occur, however. Paul did not suffer redemptively. Jesus completed the work of redemption for all people. Paul’s task was to open the door for a universal proclamation of the gospel. At the least, he hoped to convince all people of the validity of the gospel and its application to all persons, Jew or Gentile.

TO COMPLETE THE WORD OF GOD (1:25–27)

1:25 The second aspect of Paul’s ministry involved the word of God. He stated that God called him to “present to you the word of God in its fullness” (1:25). Again, Paul’s use of a word built on the Greek word “fill” reveals the importance of his argument. But in what sense could Paul claim to fill the word of God?

The Role of Paul. Paul saw his role as a servant (*diakonos*) of the church. *Diakonos* speaks to the true servant role rather than some position of authority or leadership that might be inherent in another term. Even the term “slave” (*doulos*) sometimes carries the idea of authority, similar to the Old Testament “servant of the Lord.” “Servant” (*diakonos*) does not. The service fulfilled a part of the divine plan which God foresaw long ago, but which he clarified through the course of events in Paul’s life. In fact, not everyone understood the working of God as Paul did. In the administration of God (*oikonomia*; lit., “household management”), God selected Paul to complete what was lacking in understanding and fulfilling the Old Testament predictions of the future. Colossians 1:25–27, like v. 24, are filled with eschatological language. Terms like “administration” (“commission,” NIV), “mystery,” and “now revealed,” look to the

⁵⁶¹⁴⁷ G. B. Caird, *Paul’s Letters from Prison: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, NClarB* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), says, “It is almost as if he is thinking of a fixed quota of suffering to be endured” (184).

Messianic Age of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. They call for a careful analysis. Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles, served the church by alerting them to the meaning and significance of many obscure Old Testament passages. By his divinely appointed ministry, Paul encouraged a fulfillment of prophecy related to the Gentile mission. Until his day, these texts had been a mystery.

The Revelation to Paul. 1:26 Paul's role in the administration of God's plan related to the "mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints" (1:26). In Pauline terminology, a mystery was a truth which lay hidden in the pages of the Old Testament, and its explanation awaited another day.¹⁴⁵⁷⁸ The day of understanding came with the death and resurrection of Christ, and the mystery was revealed to the saints (believers). The language and themes call to mind Eph 3:1ff., where Paul explicitly detailed his calling in God's redemptive plan. There was no sense of pride. God selected Paul for this special service of theological disclosure.⁵⁸

It was Paul's custom to write about his own missionary labors and personal involvement with his readers, most naturally after the opening thanksgiving (Rom. 1:11–15; 1 Thes. 2:17–3:11; cf. the lengthy *narratio* in Gal. 1:10–2:21), but elsewhere also (Rom. 15:14–32; 1 Cor. 16:1–11; Phm. 21–22). The irregularity of such features is simply a reminder that Paul treated matters of structure and format as completely adaptable to what he wanted to say. So after the lengthy thanksgiving (cf. 1 Thes. 1:2–2:16), Paul picks up the final clause of the last section ("of which I Paul became a minister") and fills it out.

Aletti, *Épître aux Colossiens* 132–33, notes the prominence of revelation/ knowledge language in 1:24–2:5 (μυστήριον in 1:26, 27; 2:2; φανερώω in 1:26; γνωρίζω in 1:27; καταγγέλλω in 1:28; σοφία in 1:28; 2:3; οἶδα in 2:1; σύνεσις in 2:2; ἐπίγνωσις in 2:2; γνῶσις in 2:3). Again, this need not imply a strong "Gnostic" or hidden knowledge content in the teaching and praxis being confronted at Colossae; of the words cited, only σοφία (2:23) appears within the explicitly polemical section (2:8–23), and, somewhat surprisingly, ἀποκαλύπτω/ἀποκάλυψις not at all. The inspiration for this language comes from Paul's own self-awareness rather than that of the Colossians. Here the objective was possibly to boost further the Colossian believers' self-esteem by reinforcing their appreciation of the riches of

⁵⁷¹⁴⁸ His terminology parallels that of the Qumran community which developed a *raz-pesher* hermeneutic. The $\tau\upsilon$ (mystery) was generally equivalent to the Pauline μυστήριον. It was a truth unexplained in the Old Testament which awaited another day for clear explication. The explanation was a *pesher*, a term common among the rabbis for the interpretations they derived from the biblical text. This hermeneutical motif found its most similar use to Paul's in the Qumran community as the Teacher of Righteousness interpreted Scripture. E. E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), and F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (London: Tyndale, 1960).

⁵⁸ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 237–241.

insight and glory given to them in Christ (the focus of the whole paragraph: 1:24, 27–28; 2:2–3, 5) and at such cost to Paul (1:24, 29; 2:1). They should not allow others to denigrate the Christians’ privileges (2:4, 8) or to compare these privileges unfavorably with their own (2:16, 18).

1:24 νῦν χαίρω ἐν τοῖς παθήμασιν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ ἀνταναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, ὃ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐκκλησία. The initial statement echoes a characteristic Pauline theme, that of rejoicing in suffering (Rom. 5:3—boasting in afflictions [cf. 12:12]; 8:18—sufferings not worth comparison with the coming glory [similarly 2 Cor. 4:17–18]; 2 Cor. 1:5–7—abundance of sufferings matched by abundance of comfort; 2 Cor. 7:4—“I am overflowing with joy in our affliction”; 1 Thes. 1:6—“you received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit”). As these texts show, such suffering is characteristic of apostolic ministry (also 1 Cor. 4:9–13; 2 Cor. 11:23–27; Gal. 6:17), but not distinctive of it either (over against that of other Christians). Nor indeed is it a distinctively Pauline theme, since positive evaluation of suffering is to be found in Stoic sources (such as Seneca’s *De Providentia* 4), as also in contemporary Jewish sources (e.g., 1QH 9:24–25; *Psalms of Solomon* 10:1–2; 2 *Baruch* 52:6, cited in my *Romans* 250). Rather, it is the response of those who recognize that suffering positively reacted to can be a maturing experience, as also of those convinced of the rightness of their cause, which conviction functions as an inner source of strength and transforms the sufferings into a confirmation of that rightness. At this point the line between blind fanaticism and unflinching devotion can become very thin.

Here at least we can say that Paul accepted suffering on behalf of others (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν)—a reminder that the sufferings were not sought in anything like a masochistic spirit, but were accepted, indeed welcomed, as the unavoidable consequence of the all-important objective of preaching the gospel. What the sufferings in view here might have involved is documented in 2 Cor. 11:23–28.

Paul’s theology of suffering, however, was still richer. For Paul suffering meant suffering with Christ, sharing Christ’s sufferings (Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:5; 4:10–11; Phil. 3:10–11). It is clearly this theme which is taken further here in the surprising sentence, “I fill up what is lacking of the afflictions of the Christ in my flesh.” The words have caused bewilderment to generations of translators⁵⁹⁶ and commentators.⁶⁰⁷ But in fact they are simply the extension of Paul’s complete

⁵⁹⁶ NEB: “This is my way of helping to complete, in my poor human flesh, the full tale of Christ’s afflictions still to be endured”; REB: “I am completing what still remains for Christ to suffer in my own person”; NJB: “in my own body to make up all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ.”

⁶⁰⁷ The one thing on which most are clear is that there can be no thought here of Christ’s vicarious sufferings being inadequate or insufficient, not least since Paul never calls Christ’s sufferings “afflictions” (see particularly discussion in Schweizer, *Colossians* 101–3; Aletti, *Épître aux Colossiens* 134–36). Almost as unanimous is the view that the category of “mystical union with Christ” is inappropriate, particularly since it leaves unexplained the “lack in Christ’s afflictions” (see particularly Lohmeyer 77–78). For exegetical alternatives see Kremer 174–95; Gnllka, *Kolossierbrief* 95–96; O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* 77–78; and Pokorný 96–99; and for the earlier history of interpretation see Kremer 5–152.

eschatological schema. It contains several elements: (1) Christ's sufferings and death as the eschatological tribulation expected as the antecedent to the new age—Paul's adaptation, reflected particularly in Rom. 8:18–23, of an older Jewish theme;⁶¹⁸ (2) participation in the death of Christ as itself the means of transition from old age to new (Rom. 6:3–11; 8:18–23 prefaced by 8:17; 2 Cor. 4:10–12 leading into 4:16–5:5; Phil. 3:10–11; Heb. 2:9–10 offers a different model with equivalent effect); and, consequently, (3) Christian existence as a lifelong process in which dying with Christ leads to a share of his final resurrection (Rom. 6:5; Gal. 2:19; 6:14—still nailed to the cross with Christ [note the perfect tenses]; Rom. 6:5; 8:11, 23; Phil. 3:11—resurrection still future; see further my *Jesus* 326–38).

Col. 1:24 is clearly building on this theme.⁶²⁹ In particular, the thought that Paul's sharing in Christ's death was essential to the well-being of his converts is already present in 2 Cor. 4:10–12. To be sure, the schema is modified in Colossians in the thought that resurrection with Christ is already past (see on 2:12). On the other hand, the retention or at least echo of the titular force of Christ ("the Christ") reinforces the Jewish character of the schema (so we can speak already of "the messianic woes"; see G. Bertram, *TDN*⁶³ 9:671–72). But Paul here has also made a unique addition to the theme by adding the (implied) thought that Christ's afflictions lack something (ὑστέρημα, "lack, deficiency")⁶⁴⁰ and need to be completed in Paul's flesh (ἀνταναπληρῶ, literally "fill up in place of"; cf. the similar phrase in 1 Cor. 16:17 and Phil. 2:30; see Abbott 229–30; Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* 71 n. 25). This again is partly a reflection of the cosmic scope of the reconciliation envisaged and of Paul's awareness that it is not yet complete; therefore the decisive sufferings of the Christ cannot yet be complete.

⁶¹⁸ Dan. 7:21–22, 25–27; 12:1–3; *Jubilees* 23:22–31; 1QH 3:28–36; *Testament of Moses* 5–10; Matt. 3:11/Luke 3:16 (drawing on Isa. 30:27–28); Mark 10:38; Acts 14:22. See further Str-B 4.977–86.

⁶²⁹ Cf. Dibelius, *Kolosser, Epheser, Philemon* 22–23; Best 130–36; Moule, *Colossians and Philemon* 76–79; Kamlah, "Wie beurteilt Paulus sein Leiden?"; Bauckham; O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* 78–80. As Lightfoot 163 noted, "the afflictions ... which Christ endured" ... seems to be the only natural interpretation of the words." Schweizer, *Colossians* 104, however, resists this whole train of thought when he insists that "one can understand 'Christ's afflictions' only as the sufferings endured in the community for the sake of Christ, or 'in Christ'"; similarly A. Wikenhauser, *Pauline Mysticism: Christ in the Mystical Teaching of St Paul* (Freiburg: Herder, 1960) 159–62. The motif is only partially grasped also by Gnllka, *Kolosserbrief* 98 (also *Theologie* 340), and Pokorný 99–100. Thus the latter: "The apostle struggles and suffers in order that people may 'realize' that their salvation in Jesus Christ is already completed.... What is still 'lacking' is the appropriation of the already complete salvation."

⁶³ *TDNT* G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

⁶⁴¹⁰ The fact that ὑστέρημα also became a Gnostic technical term (see, e.g., Moule, *Colossians and Philemon* 79) simply underlines the danger of reading the outlines of "the Colossian heresy" back from these later sources, since it is very hard to conceive what use the "false teaching" would have been making of the concept to which Paul would then be responding.

Foreshadowed is the apocalyptic thought that there is an appointed sum of suffering that must be endured in order to trigger (as it were) the final events of history (Rev. 6:9–11; 4 Ezra 4:33–43);¹⁶⁵¹ the thought then is that the death of Christ has (as it were) activated the first trigger, but those sufferings are not yet complete, otherwise the second and final trigger would have been activated too.

Central to this further thought is the claim that these remaining afflictions are being experienced by Paul himself (“in my flesh”).¹⁶⁶² The claim is not megalomaniac, as though Paul thought he could supplement the work of divine Wisdom-Christ’s act of cosmic reconciliation (“a theologically untenable glorification of the apostle by one of his followers,” according to H. Hübner, *EDN*⁶⁷T 3.110; similarly Löwe 313; Nielsen 111–14; Beker, *Heirs* 68; Roloff 225–26). It is rather the most striking expression of a conviction which Paul seems to have had from the beginning of his apostolic ministry, namely that his mission was to fulfill or complete that of the Servant of Yahweh, that is, also of the suffering Servant of deuterio- Isaiah.¹⁶⁸³ This underlines in turn the degree to which Paul understood his apostleship in eschatological terms as the last act on the stage of this world before (as we would say) the final curtain (particularly 1 Cor. 4:9).¹⁶⁹⁴ It was because Paul saw himself as a major actor in the final drama of God’s reconciling purpose that he could also see his all too real sufferings as somehow bringing to completion what was still outstanding of the sufferings of Christ (“crucified with Christ”) by which the world was redeemed and transformed.

One interesting corollary is that for such a theology to be realistically put forward it was almost essential that Paul was still alive. If he was dead, then his sufferings were complete, and so also (the most obvious corollary to this verse) were Christ’s afflictions; and where then was

⁶⁵¹¹ See further R. Stuhlmann, *Das eschatologische Mass im Neuen Testament* (FRLANT 132; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1983), here 99–101; otherwise Nielsen 112.

⁶⁶¹² Not “the afflictions of Christ-in-my-flesh” (Houlden 180), which would require τοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου. Flemington also insists on the importance of taking “in my flesh” in close conjunction with the preceding words: “the afflictions of Christ as they are reflected and reproduced in the life and behaviour of Paul his apostle” (87; cf. Wolter 101–2). But he does not give enough weight to ὑπερήματα and to the ὑπέρ clause, neither of which, however, need detract from the finished and decisive character of the cross (see also n. 7 above).

⁶⁷*EDNT Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. H. Balz and G. Schneider (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–93)

⁶⁸¹³ Note particularly Rom. 15:20–21 (= Isa. 52:15); 2 Cor. 6:1–2 (= Isa. 49:8); Gal. 1:15–16 (echoing Isa. 49:1–6); Phil. 2:16 (cf. Isa. 49:4). The same conviction impressed itself on the Acts material: 13:47 (= Isa. 49:6); 26:16–18 (cf. Isa. 42:7); also 18:9–10 (cf. Isa. 41:10; 43:5). Cf. Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians* 82–83.

⁶⁹¹⁴ See further my *Jesus* 111–13, referring particularly to O. Cullmann, “Le caractère eschatologique du devoir missionnaire et de la conscience apostolique de S. Paul. Étude sur le κατέχον(-ων) de 2 Thes. 2:6–7,” *RHPR* 16 (1936) 210–45; A. Fridrichsen, *The Apostle and His Message* (Uppsala: Lundequistaka, 1947); Munck 36–42. Paul is himself part of the mystery he proclaims (Merklein 29–30). In contrast, A. T. Hanson, “Development” 160–65 sees the delay in the parousia as the key to the thought here.

the end of all things? Here is a further slight indication that the letter was probably written while Paul was still alive, not by him, but with his approval. It follows further (despite most) that the sense of eschatological expectancy in the letter must have been still high if Paul's missionary work was nearly over. Nor should his subsequent death be allowed to devalue the whole line of thought overmuch. For at its heart is the double claim that the suffering and dying of Christ provides a key insight into the way the cosmos is constituted and into its reclamation (1:15–20) and that it is only by identification with this Christ in the way of suffering that those who serve the church can help it truly to be his body, the body which mirrors the cosmos as it was intended to be.

To be noted, finally, is the further change rung on the use of σῶμα. As just implied, the thought of 1:18a is deliberately echoed in the last two phrases of the verse: “on behalf of his body, which is the church” (see on 1:18a). But the addition of “his” (“his body”) also echoes 1:22 (“the body of his flesh”). We may say then that the embodiment of Wisdom-Christ, which was more impersonal in the cosmos (1:18), was succeeded by an embodiment in the particularity of human flesh (1:22), to be succeeded in turn by an embodiment in the (universal) church (1:24), but now characterized by the personality known in and as Jesus Christ. While the cosmos does not cease to be pervaded by the divine Wisdom, which sustains it (how could it then continue to hold together?), the means by which the world encounters and interacts with this Wisdom now recognized as Christ is primarily through his body, the church, just as the means by which Christ encounters and acts upon the world of humanity is primarily through his body, the church. The privilege, but also obligation, of the church so conceived is staggering. In the same vein we should not ignore the further interplay with 1:22: the act of reconciliation took place ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ; Paul fills up what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ. There is a degree of continuity between Christ's body of flesh and Paul's flesh for Christ's body (cf. Ernst, *Philipper, Philemon, Kolosser, Epheser* 183).

1:25 ἧς ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ διάκονος κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς πληρῶσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ. The astonishing claim just made is at once balanced and modified by repetition and variation of the claim made already in 1:23, “the church, of which I became a servant.” Despite the attractive simplicity of translating “the church of which I became deacon (διάκονος),” we are clearly not yet at the stage where the term has become a formal and uniform title for a recognized office in the Pauline churches (as subsequently in 1 Tim. 3:8, 12; but evidently not yet in Rom. 16:1 and Phil. 1:1).¹⁷⁰⁵ Paul, who was so insistent on his apostolic status, would hardly wish to be thought to lay claim to what subsequently was understood as a much lower function. The thought here in fact is both much grander and more humble. For on the one hand, the church of which Paul has claimed to be servant is the church, Christ's body, microcosm of the cosmic world body of Stoic speculation (1:18). But on the other, it is the church in Colossae and other places, small groups of believers in the cities of the

¹⁷⁰⁵ Schweizer finds here a mark of post-Pauline authorship: “Paul never describes himself as a minister of the church” (*Colossians* 106; cf. Wolter 102–3; Yates, *Colossians* 31). But we should recall how often Paul spoke of his work as “ministry” (διακονία, Rom. 11:13; 15:31; 1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Cor. 3:7–9; 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; διακονέω, Rom. 15:25; 2 Cor. 3:3; 8:19–20).

eastern Mediterranean region, and it is the humble role of table servant to which Paul has laid claim (see on 1:7). Here again we should take seriously Paul's concern to spend himself in the service and for the benefit of others; the love in which he was held by so many testifies to the real benefit he succeeded in bringing.

This service was in accord with the οἰκονομία of God that had been given to Paul, that is, by God, "with you in view" (maintaining the personal touch toward a congregation he had not yet met). The verbal phrase echoes one of Paul's regular ways of speaking of his commission, "the grace of God given to me" (Rom. 12:3; 15:15; 1 Cor. 3:10; Gal. 2:9). The noun would normally designate the administration or stewardship carried out by the οἰκονόμος ("steward or administrator" of an estate); it is consonant with the train of thought here that in the Roman Empire as a whole at this time the οἰκονόμοι were usually of servile origin (whether slave or freed; D. B. Martin, *Slavery* 15–17). But Paul applied the language to his own work: he saw himself as commissioned by his master, like a good steward having received his orders for the master's absence; hence 1 Cor. 9:17, and cf. Eph. 3:2 with here (cf. Ignatius, *Ephesians* 6:1 and *Diognetus* 7:1). The thought is already developing into the fuller and still more distinctive Christian idea of "God's plan of salvation" (as in Eph. 1:10; 3:9), as the transition to 1:26 here indicates,¹⁷¹⁶ but "commission" is still adequate here (so also NI⁷²V and NRS⁷³V, though NE⁷⁴B/RE⁷⁵B's "task assigned to me by God" and NJ⁷⁶B's "responsibility" are too light for the context and RS⁷⁷V's "divine office" too heavy).

All this is confirmed by the description of the commission as "to fulfill (literally) the word of God," the latter a regular phrase to denote the gospel, delivered as it was by word of mouth (see BAG⁷⁸D s.v. λόγος 1bβ). The verb is unusual in this context, but must mean "complete" (the preaching of) the gospel (BAG⁷⁹D s.v. πληρόω 3). As in the only close parallel use, in Rom. 15:19, there is an eschatological overtone: Paul's commission as apostle (to the Gentiles) was intended as a decisive factor in completing the inbringing of the Gentiles and so facilitating the final climax of God's purpose (Rom. 11:13–15, 25–32; cf. 2 Tim. 4:17).¹⁸⁰⁷ Certainly it is such an

⁷¹¹⁶ See particularly J. Reumann, "Οἰκονομία-Terms in Paul in Comparison with Lucan *Heilsgeschichte*," *NTS* 13 (1966–67) 147–67, here 162–63.

⁷²NIV New International Bible

⁷³NRSV New Revised Standard Version

⁷⁴NEB New English Bible

⁷⁵REB Revised English Bible

⁷⁶NJB New Jerusalem Bible

⁷⁷RSV Revised Standard Version

⁷⁸BAGD W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979)

⁷⁹BAGD W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979)

⁸⁰¹⁷ Cf. particularly Gnllka, *Kolosserbrief* 99. Others take it of a full (dynamic and effective) preaching (O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* 83; NEB: "to deliver his message in

awesome sweep and scope of divine purpose which is in view in the continuation of the sentence in the next two verses (see also on 1:24 end).

1:26 τὸ μυστήριον τὸ ἀποκεκρυμμένον ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν γενεῶν—νῦν δὲ ἐφανερώθη τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ. “The word of God” to which Paul had been commissioned is further defined as “the mystery hidden from the ages and from the generations.” ἈΠὸ (“from”) could indicate those from whom the mystery had been hidden. In that case the αἰῶνες and the γενεαί would have to be understood as further names of heavenly powers (cf. 1:16). Some would argue so in regard to the first of these terms, “the Aions” (see BAG⁸¹D s.v. αἰών 4; Dibelius, *Kolosser, Epheser, Philemon* 24–25; Lohmeyer 82; Scott 33), the powers that rule over each age (*aion*; cf. 1 Cor. 2:6, 8; 2 Cor. 4:4). The issue is even sharper in Ephesians, which besides the closely parallel Eph. 3:9 also speaks of “the αἰών of this world” (2:2). Even in this latter case, however, it is probably better to take αἰών simply in its more common meaning of “age” (see particularly T. Holtz, *EDN*⁸²T 1.44–46; Lincoln, *Ephesians* 94–95). And here the case is even clearer since γενεαί simply means “generations” and most obviously denotes the time spanned by numerous generations.¹⁸³⁸ It is typically semitic, as repeated phrases like “from generations to generations” make clear (e.g., Exod. 17:16; Pss. 10:6; 49:11; 77:8; Is. 34:17; Joel 2:2; so also Lk. 1:50 and Eph. 3:21). And αἰῶνες is regularly used in the New Testament to denote time understood as a sequence of ages: so particularly “this age” (e.g., Matt. 12:32; Luke 16:18; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:20; Eph. 1:21; 2 Tim. 4:10) and “the age to come” (Matt. 12:32; Mark 10:30; Eph. 1:21; Heb. 6:5); and in echo of regular Old Testament phrases, “to the age(s)” = “forever,” and “from the age” = “from everlasting” (Lohmeyer 82 n. 1). Lohmeyer also notes how often the words are linked (as in Exod. 40:15; Esth. 10:3; Isa. 51:9; Tob. 1:4; Sir. 24:33). So here ἀπὸ is best taken in a temporal sense and the phrase as meaning “from (and so throughout) the ages and generations” (so NRS⁸⁴V; NE⁸⁵B/RE⁸⁶B’s “for long ages and through many generations” weakens the stark strength of the phrase).

The term μυστήριον heightens still further the already eschatological and apocalyptic sense of being privileged to see the whole sweep of human history from God’s standpoint. For here it is clearly dependent on Jewish apocalyptic usage, where “mystery” refers not so much to undisclosed secrets (as it is used in regard to the rituals of contemporary Hellenistic mystery

full”; REB: “to put God’s word into full effect”), but this ignores the apocalyptic eschatological context.

⁸¹BAGD W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979)

⁸²EDNT *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. H. Balz and G. Schneider (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–93)

⁸³¹⁸ A. T. Hanson, “Development” 165–68, follows Houlden in suggesting that the phrase means “from angels and men.”

⁸⁴NRSV New Revised Standard Version

⁸⁵NEB New English Bible

⁸⁶REB Revised English Bible

cults)¹⁸⁷⁹ as to secrets of the divine purpose now revealed by divine agency. This usage begins with the first classic Jewish apocalypse, Daniel (Dan. 2:18–19, 27–30): “God is ... a revealer of mysteries.” And it recurs regularly in subsequent apocalypses (e.g., *1 Enoch* 103:2; 106:19; 2 *Enoch* 24:3; 4 *Ezra* 10:38; 14:5; Rev. 10:7), as also in the DS⁸⁸S (e.g., 1QS 3:23; 4:18; 1QpHab 7:5; 1Q27). It is indeed at the heart of the apocalyptic rationale: what has been “revealed” to the apocalypticist is precisely the “mystery” of how the cosmos functions and particularly of how God’s purpose will achieve its predetermined end.²⁸⁹⁰

What is claimed here, then, is the basic Jewish apocalyptic credo, which goes beyond the Platonic-Stoic (and apocalyptic) axiom that the cosmos is rationally ordered (1:15–20) and claims further that not only the three dimensions of spatial existence but also the fourth dimension of time is firmly under divine control. The movement of world history is a linear progression which has also been directed by a secret purpose determined from the beginning by the one God. It is a secret purpose, hitherto “hidden” by divine intention (as in Luke 10:21; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:9). But “now” (the eschatological *vũv*, similar to 1:22), as that purpose nears or reaches its climax (the typical apocalyptic perception), it has been revealed, “disclosed” (NE⁹⁰B/RE⁹¹B, NI⁹²V; not the classical apocalyptic term ἀποκαλύπτω, but the near synonym φανερώω; cf. particularly Rom. 16:26). This is what gives apocalypticism its character: the claim to have been privileged “now” with an insight into God’s purpose for creation not given to others.²⁹³¹

In this case the recipients of the revelation are called “his saints” (see on 1:2).²⁹⁴² Elsewhere the emphasis is more on Paul as the one who has been given the privilege (Rom. 11:25; Eph. 3:3, 4, 8–9; 6:19); but since he saw his task precisely as making this mystery known to others (cf. Eph. 1:9), it comes to the same thing. At all events, the implication here, as 4:3–4 confirms, is

⁸⁷¹⁹ See, e.g., C. Kerényi, “The Mysteries of the Kabeiroi” (1944), in *The Mysteries: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1955) 32–61 (here 41–42).

⁸⁸DSS Dead Sea Scrolls

⁸⁹²⁰ For bibliography on “mystery” see, e.g., Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* 74 n. 44; H. Krämer, *EDNT* 2.446. Particularly valuable is Brown.

⁹⁰NEB New English Bible

⁹¹REB Revised English Bible

⁹²NIV New International Bible

⁹³²¹ N. A. Dahl, “Form-Critical Observations on Early Christian Preaching,” *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976) 30–36, found in Paul’s talk of a previously hidden mystery now revealed a regular “revelation pattern” and suggested that the language here might indicate an underlying fixed formulation (followed by Lührmann, *Offenbarungsverständnis* 124–33: “das Revelationsschema”; cf. Lona 110–12).

⁹⁴²² Whatever “saints” refers to in 1:12, there can be little doubt here (despite Lohmeyer 82–83) that it refers to believers in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:8–9: “to us”). For Paul to use “the saints” for ecclesiastical leaders alone (Bockmuehl, *Revelation* 183–85) would fly in the face of Paul’s ecclesiology and his identification of Gentile believers as a whole with Israel’s heritage (1:2; 3:12)

that the revelation to the saints took place particularly through Paul's preaching (Lührmann, *Offenbarungsverständnis* 121; Aletti, *Épître aux Colossiens* 140): his gospel was itself an apocalypse (cf. Rom. 16:25; Gal. 1:12; Eph. 3:3).⁹⁵

24. νῦν Χαίρω. νῦν is not transitional (*"quae cum ita sint,"* Lücke), which would require οὔν or the like, but refers to present time. Now as a prisoner "with a chain upon my wrist" (Eadie). His active service as διάκονος is at present suspended, but the sufferings which it had brought upon him are a source of joy. Lightfoot understands it thus: "Now, when I contemplate the lavish wealth of God's mercy, now when I see all the glory of bearing a part in this magnificent work, my sorrow is turned into joy." But there is no indication of such a connexion of thought in the text.

ὄς is prefixed to νῦν in D* G, Vulg. *al.* (AV.). It is, doubtless, a repetition of the first syllable of διάκονος, assisted by the desire to supply a connecting link between the sentences. For examples of similar abruptness compare 2 Cor. 7:9; 1 Tim. 1:12.

ἐν. Compare Phil. 1:18, ἐν τούτῳ χαίρω: Rom. 5:3, **καυχώμεθα ἐν ταῖς θλίψιν.**

After παθήμασιν, μου is added in Text. Rec. with κ^c and many cursives, Syr-Pes^{96h}, Arm^{97.}, Eth^{98.}, *al.*

ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, to be connected with παθήμασιν. His sufferings had been brought on him by his labours on behalf of the Gentiles, *"propter vestrum gentium salutem,"* Estius, and so with a kindly personal reference he represents them as endured on behalf of the Colossians, who shared in the benefit of his ministry. The article is not required before ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, τοῖς παθήμασιν being = οἷς πάσχω.

ἀνταναπληρῶ. This double compound is not found elsewhere in LXX or N.T. ἀναπληροῦν is found six times in N.T., twice in connexion with ὑστέρημα, 1 Cor. 16:17; Phil. 2:30. προσαναπληροῦν also occurs twice with ὑστέρημα, but in a different sense, the former verb referring to a deficiency left by, the latter to one felt by, the persons mentioned. What modification is introduced in the meaning of ἀναπληροῦν by the addition of ἀντι- is disputed. ἀντι in composition with a verb does not imply "instead of another," as Photius here takes it

⁹⁵ James D. G. Dunn, [*The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 113–121.

⁹⁶Syr-Pesh The Peshitto Syriac.

⁹⁷Arm. Armenian.

⁹⁸Eth. Ethiopic.

(τουτέστιν, Ἄντι δεσπότης καὶ διδασκάλου ὁ δοῦλος ἐγώ, κ.τ.λ.), but “over against,” which may be either in opposition, as ἀντιλέγω, ἀντικείμεναι, or in correspondence, in turn, as ἀντιμετρέω, ἀντικαλέω Luke 14:12), ἀντιλαμβάνομαι, etc. Here the ἀντι- has been understood by some as referring to διακονία, the suffering now taking the place of the former active service, or as indicating that the apostle’s afflictions were in response to what Christ had done for him. It is, perhaps, sufficient to say, with Wetstein, that it indicates the correspondence with the ὑστερημα, “ἀντι ὑστερήματος succedit ἀναπλήρωμα.” (So Meyer, Alford, Ellicott, Eadie, Soden.) Lightfoot objects that this practically deprives ἀντι of any meaning, for ἀναπληροῦν alone would denote as much. He adopts Winer’s view, that ἀνταναπληροῦν is used of one who “alterius ὑστερημα de suo explet,” or, as Lightfoot puts it, “that the supply comes from an opposite quarter to the deficiency.” Instances are cited in which this idea (or rather that of “a different quarter”) is expressed in the context, for example, Dion Cass. xlv. 48, ἴν’ ὅσον ... ἐνέδει, τοῦτο ἐκ τῆς παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων συντελείας ἀνταναπληρωθῆ. The requirements of this passage seem to be fully met by the idea of correspondence, as will appear if we translate: “in order that ... as much as was wanting ... this might be correspondingly supplied.” And in the two instances in which ἀναπληροῦν is used with ὑστερημα, the supply is from a different quarter from the deficiency, so that there is no more reason for including this idea in ἀνταναπλ., than in ἀναπλ.

In Demosth. (*De Symm.* p. 182), **τούτων τῶν συμμωριῶν ἐκόστην διελεῖν κελεύω πέντε μέρη κατὰ δώδεκα ἄνδρας, ἀνταναπληροῦντας πρὸς τὸν εὐπορώτατον ἀεὶ τοὺς ἀπορωτάτους**, the idea is that the poorer members should balance the rich in each μέρος, so as to equalise the μέρη. It is this idea of balance that is expressed by the ἀντι-.

Similarly the substantive ἀνταναπλήρωσις in Diog. Laert. x. 48, καὶ γὰρ ῥεῦσις ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν σωμάτων ἐπιπολῆς συνεχῆς συμβαίνει, οὐκ ἐπίδηκος αἰσθήσει διὰ τὴν ἀνταναπλήρωσιν, *i.e.* On account of the counter-supply, *i.e.* the supply which “meets” the deficiency.

It is not, perhaps, an over-refinement to suggest that ἀνταναπληρῶ is more unassuming than ἀναπληρῶ, since part of the force of the word is thrown on the idea of correspondence.

τὰ ὑστερήματα. The plural is used because the afflictions are not regarded as a unity from which there is a definite shortcoming. Compare 1 Thess. 3:10, τὰ ὑστερήματα τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν where the singular would suggest that their faith, as faith, was defective, while the plural suggests that there were points in which it needed to be made perfect.

τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ. By two classes of commentators these words are understood to mean the afflictions which Christ endured. First, many Roman Catholic expositors, including Caietan, Bellarmine, and more recently Bisping, find in the passage a support for the theory that the merits of the saints constitute a treasure of the Church from which indulgences may be granted. Estius, with his usual candour, while holding the doctrine to be Catholic and apostolic, yet judges that “*ex hoc Ap. loco non videtur admodum solide statui posse. Non enim sermo iste, quo dicit Ap. se pati pro ecclesia, necessario sic accipiendus est, quod pro redimendis peccatorum poenis quas fidelis debent, patiat, quod forte nonnihil haberet arrogantiae; sed percommode sic accipitur, quomodo proxime dixerat ‘gaudeo in passionibus meis pro vobis’ ut nimirum utraque parte significet afflictiones et persecutiones pro salute fidelium ipsiusque ecclesiae promovendae toleratas.*” It has been more fully replied (*e.g.* by Lightfoot) that the sufferings of Christ may be regarded from two different points of view, either as *satisfactoriae*

or *aedificatoriae*. In the former sense there can be no ὑστέρημα, Christ's sufferings and those of His servants are different in *kind*, and therefore in-commensurable. But in this sense θλίψις would be an unsuitable word, and, in fact, it is never applied in any sense to Christ's sufferings. In the second point of view, however, that of ministerial utility, "it is a simple matter of fact that the afflictions of every saint and martyr do supplement the afflictions of Christ. The Church is built up by repeated acts of self-denial in successive individuals and successive generations" (Lightfoot).

It is no doubt true that these "continue the work which Christ began" (compare 2 Cor. 1:5; 1 Pet. 4:13). But to say this is not to say that there was any "shortcoming" in the afflictions of Christ. His work, including His sufferings, was absolutely complete; and so far as others carry it on, their work is included in His (Phil. 4:13). To say that He left something "behind" is to slur over the meaning of ὑστέρημα, which does not mean something left behind, but a want of sufficiency. Nowhere in the N.T. is anything of the kind suggested. And the Colossians were the last to whom St. Paul would use, without explanation, a phrase which would be so open to misconception, as tending to foster the delusion that either saints or angels could add anything to Christ's work. If affliction could do so, why not (it might be said) self-imposed suffering, asceticism, or gratuitous self-denial? Moreover, can it be supposed that St. Paul, who calls himself the least of saints, and not meet to be called an apostle, would express himself thus without some qualification? Lightfoot would mitigate the apparent arrogance by the remark that "the present tense, ἀναπληρῶ, denotes an inchoate, not a complete act." The term "inchoate" does not seem to be justified. The present, indeed, denotes an act continuing and therefore not finished, but not incomplete as far as the present moment is concerned. Compare the instances of ἀναπληρῶ itself: Matt. 13:14, ἀναπληροῦται αὐτοῖς ἡ προφητεία, κ.τ.λ.: 1 Cor. 14:16, ὁ ἀναπληρῶν τὸν τόπον τοῦ ἰδιώτου: 2 Cor. 9:12, οὐ μόνον ἐστὶ προσαναπληροῦσα τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν ἁγίων, ἀλλὰ καὶ περισσεύουσα, κ.τ.λ. Compare also the present of πληροῦν, Gal. 5:14; Eph. 5:18; Col. 4:17.

A third view is adopted by Chrysostom, Theophylact, Augustine, and most expositors, ancient and modern. According to this, "the afflictions of Christ" are the sufferings of His Body, the Church, so called because "He really felt them." So Augustine on Ps. 61. says of Christ, "*qui passus est in capite nostro et patitur in membris suis, id est, nobis ipsis.*" And Leo, quoted by Böhmer (ap. Eadie), "*passio Christi perducitur ad finem mundi,*" etc. This view is adopted amongst late commentators by Alford, Ellicott, De Wette, Olshausen. But the notion that Christ suffers affliction in His people is nowhere found in the N.T. Acts 9:4, "Why persecutest thou Me?" is not an instance. There the persecution of His saints is represented as directed against Him, but He is not represented as suffering from it. The idea that the glorified Christ continues to suffer, and that "His tribulations will not be complete till the last pang shall have past" (Alf⁹⁹.) (an idea which, as Meyer observes, would seem to imply even the thought of Christ's dying in the martyrs), is inconsistent with the scriptural representations of His exalted state. It is true that He sympathises with the afflictions of His people; but sympathy is not affliction, nor can the fact of this sympathy justify the use of the term "afflictions of Christ," without explanation, to mean the afflictions of His Church. This would be particularly unsuitable in the present

⁹⁹Alf. Alford.

connexion, for it would make St. Paul say that he rejoiced in His sufferings because they went to increase the afflictions of Christ.

It remains that (with Meyer, Soden, *al.*) we take the expression to signify the apostle's own afflictions; and to this interpretation the readers are naturally led, first, by the word θλίψις, which is never used of Christ's sufferings, but often of the apostle's; and, secondly, by the defining words ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου, which are best connected with τῶν θλίψεων. For if the writer had intended them to be taken with the verb, he would doubtless have written ἀνταναπληρῶ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου. It is said, indeed, that the words are placed here for the sake of the antithesis to τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ. But there would be no purpose served by emphasising this antithesis here, and to do so would only distract the attention of the reader.

Meyer, however, while adopting this view of θλ. τοῦ Χρ., connects ἐν τῇ σ. μου with the verb. On the other hand, Steiger, joining these words with θλ. τοῦ Χρ., connects both with the following: "the sufferings which Christ endures in my flesh for His body."

That St. Paul should call his own sufferings in the service of Christ the afflictions of Christ in his flesh, is quite in accordance with other expressions of his. For instance, in 2 Cor. 1:5 he speaks of the sufferings of Christ overflowing to him, περισσεύει τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς. In Phil. 3:10 he speaks of knowing κοινωνία τῶν παθημάτων αὐτοῦ συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ. Again, 2 Cor. 4:10, πάντοτε τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι περιφέροντες.

The form of expression, then, need not cause any difficulty. The question what St. Paul means by calling his own troubles the afflictions of Christ in his flesh is a different one, and may be answered by saying that Christ's afflictions are regarded as the type of all those that are endured by His followers on behalf of the Church. So Theodoret: Χριστὸς τὸν ὑπὲρ τῆς ἐκκλησίας κατεδέξατο θάνατον ... καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ὅσα ὑπέμεινε, καὶ ὁ θεῖος ἀπόστολος ὡσαύτως ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς ὑπέστη τὰ ποικίλα παθήματα. Compare Matt. 20:23, τὸ μὲν ποτήριόν μου πίεσθε.

ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ. The use of this designation was probably suggested by the mention of σὰρξ. ὑπὲρ is clearly not "in the place of," but "on behalf of"; cf. ver. 7.

ὃ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐκκλησία. The antithesis of σῶμα and σὰρξ rendered necessary this explanation of the words σώματος αὐτοῦ. Besides, ἐκκλησία was required by the following ἐγενόμην διάκονος.

ὃ ἐστὶν has not the same shade of meaning as ἧτις ἐστὶν (1 Tim. 3:15, ἐν οἴκῳ Θεοῦ ... ἧτις ἐστὶν ἐκκλησία). The former is equivalent to *id est*; the latter to "and such is."

25. ἧς ἐγενόμην διάκονος resumes the οὗ ἐγεν. διάκ. of ver. 23, carrying out now the active side of the ministry, as ver. 24 the passive.

κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν. "According to the stewardship in the house of God." On οἶκ. cf. Eph. 1:10. Here = the office or function of a steward, so that he is an οἰκονόμος Θεοῦ, cf. 1 Cor. 9:17, οἰκονομίαν πεπίστευμαι, and Luke 16:2. So the apostles and other ministers of the Church are called οἰκονόμοι, 1 Cor. 4:1, 7; Tit. 1:7; see also 1 Pet. 4:10. The Church is οἶκος τοῦ Θεοῦ, 1 Tim. 3:15. Chrysostom, *al.*, take οἶκ. in the sense "dispensation," which is inconsistent with τὴν δοθείσάν μοι.

εἰς ὑμᾶς, cf. ver. 24. Connected by Scholefield and Hofmann with the following πληρῶσαι. But compare Eph. 3:2, τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ τῆς δοθείσης μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς: and

Rom. 15:16, τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰς τὸ εἶναί με λειτουργὸν Χριστοῦ εἰς τὰ ἔθνη.

πληρῶσαι, not infin. of design, but explanatory of οἶκ. τὴν δοθ. κ.τ.λ. The verb is found in a similar connexion Rom. 15:19, ὥστε με ... μεχρὶ τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ πεπληρωκέναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ. ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ is frequently used by St. Paul for the gospel (1 Cor. 14:36; 2 Cor. 2:17, 4:2; 1 Thess. 2:13; compare also Acts 4:31, *al.*). The sense then is: "to carry out to the full the preaching of the gospel"; "*ad summa perducere: Paulus ubique ad summa tendit,*" Bengel. There is doubtless a reference to St. Paul's special office as the apostle of the Gentiles, by virtue of which he gave full development to the "word of God." This is suggested by **δοθεῖσάν μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς**.

Beza takes the phrase to mean "to fulfil the promise of God" (cf. 2 Chron. 36:21), which does not suit the context. Fritzsche understands it as meaning "to complete the teaching begun by Ephraim." See on Lk. 8:11.

26. τὸ μυστήριον. Lightfoot observes: "This is not the only term borrowed from the ancient mysteries, which St. Paul employs to describe the teaching of the gospel," and he mentions τέλειον, ver. 28; μεμύημαι, Phil. 4:12; and (perhaps) σφραγίζεσθαι in Eph. 1:14. There is, he says, an intentional paradox in the employment of the image by St. Paul, since the Christian mysteries are not, like the heathen, confined to a narrow circle, but are freely communicated to all. But as μυστήριον in the singular is never used by Greek writers in connexion with the ancient mysteries, and on the other hand appears to have been an ordinary word for "secret" (see note on Eph. 1:9), there seems to be no ground for the assumption that the term is borrowed from the "mysteries." The plural is used thrice only by St. Paul, viz. 1 Cor. 4:1, 13:2, 14:2; but occurs in the Gospels, Matt. 13:11; Luke 8:10. As to μεμύημαι, although the verb may have been originally borrowed from the mysteries, St. Paul found it already in use in the sense in which he employs it; cf. Alciphron, ii. 4, κυβεπνᾶν μνηθῆσομαι. For τέλειος, see on ver. 28.

τὸ ἀποκεκρυμμένον ... νῦν δὲ ἐφανερώθη. These are the two characteristics of a μυστήριον in the N.T. Compare Rom. 16:25, μυστηρίου χρόνοις αἰωνίοις σεσιγημένου, φανερωθέντος δὲ νῦν. πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων, used in 1 Cor. 2:7 of God's purpose, could not properly have been said of its concealment. ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων, κ.τ.λ. ἀπὸ here is of time, being opposed to νῦν. So ἀπ' αἰῶνος, Acts 3:21, 15:18. An αἰών includes many γενεαί; compare Eph. 3:21. The fact of the long concealment and recent disclosure of the mystery is not without point here; it explains the acceptance of the errors which the apostle is combating.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1909), 228–234.

Colossians 4:2-6 Attitude and Conduct- Making the most of it

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of* thanksgiving;

- 3 at the same time us as well, that God will open up to us a door the word, so that we may speak forth ^{101d}the mystery of Christ, which I have also ^{102e}been imprisoned;
- 4 that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.
- 5 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward ^{103b}outsiders, ^{1042105c}making the most of the opportunity.
- 6 Let your speech always be ¹⁰⁶¹with grace, *as though* seasoned with ^{107b}salt, so that you will know how you should ^{108c}respond to each person. ¹⁰⁹

^{101d} Eph 3:3, 4; 6:19

^{102e} Eph 6:20

^{103b} Mark 4:11

¹⁰⁴² Lit *redeeming the time*

^{105c} Eph 5:16

¹⁰⁶¹ Or *gracious*

^{107b} Mark 9:50

^{108c} 1 Pet 3:15

¹⁰⁹ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Col 4:2–6.