

# The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul and the Mission of the Church

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## INTRODUCTION

While Paul has traditionally been understood as expecting the churches to engage actively in outward-focused evangelism, this view has been increasingly challenged. It must be admitted that there is a lack of explicit imperatives to evangelize in Paul's letters. Nevertheless, a number of texts, however small, do seem to indicate that Paul both commended and commanded outward-focused missionary activity from the churches (1 Cor 4:16; 7:12-16; 11:1; Eph 6:15; Phil 1:12-18; 2:14-16).<sup>1</sup> As I have written elsewhere, Paul's presentation of the word of God as a dynamic entity which propels its bearers outward in mission provides the most significant theological basis for the missionary activity of the church in his letters.<sup>2</sup> The same dynamic word that indwelt Paul as an apostle

also indwelt his churches. This word determined both the church's identity and evangelistic activity in the world.

If the thesis I have outlined briefly above is a correct understanding of Paul, then one would expect the apostle to describe both himself and his churches as undergoing some of the same experiences and participating in the same missions-related activities. That is, if the word of God inevitably propels its bearers in mission, then one would expect to find Paul describing in similar fashion the missions-related activity of both apostle and church. Parallels can be drawn in a number of areas (e.g., teaching, praying, edification of the church), but for the purposes of this article, I will focus on one significant parallel—suffering in the life of the apostle Paul and the life of his churches. What does Paul's description of this common experience of suffering reveal about his understanding of his own mission and the mission of the church?

## SUFFERING, CHRISTIAN IDENTITY, AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

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I will begin by briefly noting Paul's references to suffering in his own mission and the life of the church. I will then proceed to explore the reasons for Christian suffering. According to Paul, why is it that early Christians—both apostles and ordinary believers—suffer? We will see that Paul's understanding of Christian identity and the offensiveness of the gospel are important for answering this question. A brief study of the early Christians' social context will also help clarify this matter. Finally, we will discuss two Pauline texts (2 Cor 4:7-15; Col 1:24-25) and two Pauline letters (Philippians, Thessalonians) to see what additional insights they give us into Paul's understanding of suffering.

### **CHRISTIAN IDENTITY: WHY THE APOSTLES AND CHURCH SUFFERED**

Paul could not conceive of his apostolic mission apart from suffering.<sup>3</sup> This fact is made clear by numerous passages in the Pauline epistles.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, in the book of Acts, Luke confirms that Paul saw suffering as inherent to his apostolic ministry (Acts 9:15-16; 20:23).<sup>5</sup> In parallel fashion, Paul repeatedly describes the churches as undergoing suffering and signifies that he sees such ongoing persecution as a normal feature of Christian existence (Rom 8:16-17; Gal 6:12; Phil 1:29-30; 1 Thess 2:14-16; 3:3-4; 2 Tim 1:8; 2:3; 3:12).<sup>6</sup>

What was it about the apostles and churches that made them the target of outsiders' unwavering opposition? To answer this question, we must delve into Paul's thinking on two related topics: Christian identity and the offensiveness of the gospel. First, we will look at Christian identity—i.e., characteristics of Christian existence shared by both apostles and ordinary believers. And, second, we will see how, in Paul's thinking, such common elements of Christian existence proved offensive to non-Christians.

In discussing Christian identity, we must remember that Paul viewed the dynamic gospel as indwelling and determining the activity of both apostles and churches (1 Thess 1:6-8). In Paul's thinking, it was impossible to have a church or an

apostle apart from the gospel. The genuine presence of the gospel was the determiner of Christian identity (Gal 1:6-9). This gospel, which birthed and directed Christians (1 Cor 4:15), was nothing other than the salvific message about Jesus Christ and the assurance (to believers) of his indwelling presence (Rom 8:31-39; 1 Cor 1:23). It is for this reason that Paul can often speak interchangeably about the preaching of "God's word" or the preaching of "Christ."<sup>7</sup> Paul can even describe his apostolic mission as carrying around in his own body "the death of Jesus" (2 Cor 4:10).

Paul not only viewed his apostolic existence, but the Christian life generally, as inextricably identified with Christ. Christians are "buried with [Christ] by baptism," and raised with him to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4). In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, believers "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). In Romans 10:9-10, Paul says that to be a Christian, one must identify oneself with Jesus Christ—both externally and internally. He writes, "If you *confess with your lips* that Jesus Christ is Lord and *believe in your heart* that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (my emphasis).<sup>8</sup> In Colossians 1:18, Paul describes Christians metaphorically as the "body of Christ," with Jesus Christ as the head (cf. Eph 1:22-23). In Ephesians 2:19-22, Paul says that believers are stones in a building, of which Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. In surveying Paul's various references to Christian identity it becomes clear that to be a Christian—to have received the life-giving message of the gospel—is to be inextricably associated with the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, for Paul, the whole of Christian identity might be summarized as determined by two overlapping qualities—the acceptance of and abiding presence of God's word, and the lordship of and abiding presence of God's Son.

The relationship of suffering and Christian identity becomes clear when we understand that Paul's two main identifiers of Christian existence—gospel and Christ—were offensive to the non-Christian world. This point becomes

especially significant when we note that Paul expected the gospel to spread spontaneously from its adherents (e.g., Phil 2:14-16; Col 1:5-7). An offensive message spreading spontaneously from the people who hold to it will inevitably result in opposition and suffering. Given this situation, Paul consistently presents Christians—apostles included—with two options: (1) being ashamed of the gospel, and thus denying the faith (Gal 1:6-9; 6:12), or (2) allowing the gospel to run its dynamic course through their lives and thus suffering for it (2 Tim 1:8; 3:12; cf. Luke 9:23-27). And, although a Christian’s suffering may not entail persecution for the sake of the gospel (e.g., dangers from “rivers” and “bandits” [2 Cor 11:26; cf. 1 Cor 7:28; 2 Cor 12:7; Gal 4:13]),<sup>9</sup> in Paul’s mind, it usually does.

But what is offensive about the gospel? According to Paul, the gospel heralds God’s judgment of human wickedness and false righteousness (Rom 1:16-32; Phil 3:7-9; 1 Thess 1:9; 2 Thess 2:11-12), and in defiance of that message, non-believers will attack the bearers of it (1 Cor 1:18-25; 1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 1:4-8; cf. Act 7:51-60; 1 Pet 4:1-5). The “world” which is opposed to God and his word (1 Cor 1:20-21; 2 Cor 3:14) will oppose the announcers of that word as well (John 15:18-19; 17:14, 16; Acts 9:4-5; 1 John 3:13; 4:4-6). Behind non-Christians’ rejection of (and antagonism towards) God’s messengers is not faultless ignorance or misunderstanding, but a morally culpable rejection of God’s truth (Rom 1-3; 2 Thess 1-2). Furthermore, behind these human opponents stand demonic forces who oppose God and his Christ (2 Cor 4:4; Eph 6:10-18; 1 Thess 2:18; 2 Thess 2:1-12).

The offensiveness of the gospel becomes especially clear when we consider the central subject of the gospel—Christ crucified. Paul views his gospel ministry (and, by extension, the description applies to the mission of the churches) as the parading of Christ crucified before the eyes of fallen humanity (Gal 3:1). This picture of the crucified Christ serves as a constant reminder that a horrific death was needed to rectify humanity’s

desperate state. The crucifixion declares both the awesome love of God and the miserable “failing grade” that even the best of fallen human behavior deserves (i.e., the punishment Christ received was the just penalty for even the finest of human religiosity) (Phil 3:3-10). Such an assessment does not sit well with those who prefer a more favorable evaluation of their spiritual condition, and so such persons attack those through whom the gospel of Christ progresses (Phil 3:2-3; Gal 6:12-15).

Because the identity of both the apostles and ordinary believers is determined by the presence of an offensive gospel and identification with a rejected Messiah (Gal 3:10-14), true Christians must, by their very nature, face hostility. It is due to this fact—the fundamental Christological grounding of Christian suffering—that Paul frequently refers to his or other believers’ suffering in direct relation to Christ’s suffering (e.g., Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 1:5; 2:14-15; 4:10; Gal 6:12; Phil 3:10; Col 1:24-25). Also, we should note that Paul’s view that suffering is inevitable for all Christians demonstrates the apostle’s expectation that the word of God and presence of Christ would advance to the non-believing world through all Christians (Rom 8:16-17; 2 Tim 3:12).

A similar understanding of the certainty of Christian suffering and its relation to Christian identity can be found elsewhere in the New Testament. In Acts 9:4, for example, Luke reports that Jesus asked the pre-Christian Paul, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Paul, of course, was not actually persecuting Jesus, but the early Christians who were his “body”—who were united with him in baptism, confession, and the Lord’s Supper. These early Christians were so identified with their Lord that Jesus could refer to Paul’s persecution of *them* as a persecution of *him*.

Likewise, in the Synoptic tradition, Jesus promises that his followers will face persecution and suffering (Matt 5:10-12; Luke 21:16). The reason for this persecution and suffering is the world’s hatred of *Jesus* (Matt 10:25; 24:9; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:17). Indeed, it is outsiders’ animosity

toward the *Lord himself* that elicits their attacks on Christians. The opponents of Jesus hated him because of his teachings and claims, which must have been embodied and promulgated by Jesus' followers if they faced the same opposition as him. Thus, we find in the Synoptic tradition a significant parallel to Paul's understanding of the relationship of Christian identity and suffering.

First Peter also witnesses to the connection between Christian identity and suffering. Believers are there described as "sharing Christ's sufferings" (4:13), "reviled for the name of Christ (4:14), and suffering "as ... Christian[s] ... [i.e.] because [they] bear this name" (4:16). Peter notes that if Christians are persecuted for their faith, they should rejoice because their suffering confirms that the Spirit of God truly does rest on them (4:14). The Christians' opponents are preeminently defined by their rejection of the gospel (and by extension, its bearers). That is, the opponents are those who "do not obey the gospel of God" (4:17).

In the book of Revelation, John also presents suffering as bound up with a Christian's identification with Jesus. In Revelation 1:9, John introduces himself to the churches as "I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the *persecution* and the *kingdom* and the *patient endurance* ..." (my emphasis). The three nouns italicized in the previous sentence are introduced by a single article in Greek—implying that there is a close relationship between them.<sup>10</sup> John seems to assert that one cannot experience the kingdom without the accompanying persecution and requisite patient endurance. This holistic picture of Christian experience is pre-eminently defined by a Christological qualifier—that is, the totality of this experience is "in Jesus." The following seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor also make clear that identification with Jesus invariably results in persecution.<sup>11</sup>

We have seen both in Paul's letters and the broader New Testament witness that the world is incited to persecute Christians because of their offensive gospel and rejected Christ. Yet, if everyone but Christians hates the gospel, it would seem

that the Christian faith would cease to spread. The miracle, however, is that God can change the hearts of his enemies. In this process, God uses the apostles and churches as agents to proclaim his word, but ultimately God himself removes the veil from unbelieving hearts (2 Cor 3:13-16). So, although the gospel brings life to persons living in animosity towards it, it does this only in so far as God, in his mercy, deigns to awaken hearts to his offer of grace (Rom 9:16-18). We should note this last point so that in our emphasis on the offensiveness of the gospel to the non-Christian world, we do not forget that Paul and others expected some persons to respond positively to the life-giving message of the gospel (1 Cor 9:22; Eph 3:1-13).

### **THE SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF CHRISTIAN SUFFERING**

If we were to interview a first-century opponent of early Christianity and ask him why he was persecuting Christians, he would likely differ from Paul's "theological evaluation" of the situation. That is, he would not say, "I hate the truth of what God has to say about my idolatrous life and human-based righteousness." Such spiritual realities (while ultimately true, according to Paul) played themselves out in the practicalities of daily life—in the familial, social, and political arenas.<sup>12</sup> Bruce Winter, for example, cites the following reasons for outsiders' opposition to early Christianity: the fact that Christians gathered for weekly meetings (which was against Roman law),<sup>13</sup> they did not participate in common cultic ceremonies,<sup>14</sup> and their leader was crucified (an offensive idea to Romans and Jews).<sup>15</sup> Besides these real differences from the surrounding pagan culture, Christians also faced rumors inspired by the hatred, jealousy, and fear of their opponents (Rom 3:8). As is clear from post-New Testament writings, outsiders falsely accused Christians of being cannibals, atheists, and incestuous fornicators.<sup>16</sup>

Both the broader New Testament witness and early extra-biblical materials confirm the historic-

ity of early Christian suffering. As noted above, the Synoptics, 1 Peter, and Revelation speak of Christians as suffering for their identification with Jesus. First Peter, in particular, is important in this regard because it speaks of Christians being “reviled” or “blasphemed” for their failure to partake in immoral activities they once enjoyed as non-Christians (1 Pet 4:4, 14). Indeed, as a result of social conditions in the first century, Christians quickly differentiated themselves from their pagan surroundings (e.g., 1 Cor 8:1-11:1; 1 Thess 1:9-10).<sup>17</sup> By the Christians’ withdrawal from sinful activities and their prominent new allegiance to Christ, they invited attack.

A variety of evidence in the New Testament and early Christian history indicates not only that early Christians suffered, but that the gospel was advancing through the ministry of ordinary believers. The book of Acts alone is a treasury of the entire church’s active and constant witness.<sup>18</sup> Also, it would appear that the church at Rome was founded by ordinary Christians, as Paul fails to mention any apostle or co-worker who founded it (cf. Col 1:7). Early extra-biblical documents also confirm an active evangelistic role for the entire church, as well as the persecution that the church endured from outsiders.<sup>19</sup>

From a sociological and historical perspective, we have an interest in knowing exactly what sorts of suffering the church endured from the hands of their oppressors. It is striking, then, that Paul does not offer specific examples of what this persecution entailed. Likely, such descriptions were superfluous for persons undergoing active opposition. On this point, Ernest Best remarks, “Paul does not describe [early Christians’] sufferings, but other parts of the New Testament supply glimpses of what they may have been: riots (Acts 17:5-9; 19:28-41), false accusations in court (1 Peter 4:15-16), imprisonment (Heb. 13:3), homes and businesses broken up (Heb. 10:32-34).”<sup>20</sup>

Regardless of what daily activities incited opposition and what tangible forms this opposition took, it is important to note that Paul consis-

tently assumes that non-believing outsiders are aware of Christians’ religious allegiance and that is the main reason that Christians are suffering persecution. The first century context apparently did not allow for the kind of private faith that is often found among modern Western Christians. This fact helps explain why Paul infrequently gives explicit instruction in his letters regarding the churches’ missionary work. There was apparently little need to do so since many Christians were effectively making their presence known. In such a setting, the modern dichotomy between “active” and “passive” witness seems to break down.

Yet, how—one may rightly press the question—did the non-believers learn of their Christian neighbors’ faith? As noted above, Paul assumes this fact rather than explicitly stating it. One must suppose that ordinary Christians were actively announcing their faith, as Paul occasionally mentions (1 Thess 1:8; Phil 1:12-18; 2:16; Eph 6:15) and as confirmed by other biblical and extra-biblical sources. Also, the radically changed behavior of Christians attracted attention because of its implicit rejection of others’ religious views and the dominant cultural and societal structures (1 Thess 1:9-10).

## **PATTERNS OF CHRISTIAN SUFFERING IN THE PAULINE LETTERS**

We will now take a brief look at two Pauline passages and two Pauline letters to see if they exhibit the pattern of suffering we have summarized above. Furthermore, we will seek any additional insights on Paul’s understanding of Christian suffering which might be present in the texts.

### **2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-15**

This passage deals primarily with Paul’s reflections on his apostolic sufferings. The text reads:

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We

are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God (2 Cor 4:7-15).<sup>21</sup>

By his use of "we" in this passage, Paul distinguishes himself from the Corinthians whom he is addressing. This "we" also possibly includes the other apostles generally or at least Paul's apostolic co-workers (e.g., Timothy and Titus). The "we" text on which we are focusing, 2 Corinthians 4:7-15, occurs in the midst of Paul's defense against various criticisms. Some detractors are apparently claiming that Paul is insincere (2:17), that he is trying to commend himself (3:1), that he is incompetent (3:5), that he is not clear in his teaching (4:3), and that his hardships invalidate his claim to be God's approved messenger (1:3-11; 4:7-15; 6:4).<sup>22</sup> After reminding the Corinthians of the glorious God-revealing gospel that he preaches (4:6), Paul gives a theological *apologia* for his suffering. The apostle explains that the reason that the gospel (i.e., the "treasure") is found in such a beat-up old pot (i.e., in Paul) is that his weakness and suffering serve to magnify the truth and power of the message.<sup>23</sup> The apostles' trials and hardship show that they cannot be the source of the powerful message they convey and point their audience to God.

Also, from this passage, we discover that Paul

thinks suffering not only accompanies the apostles' proclamation of the gospel, but is a proclamation of the gospel. This fact is made clear by Paul's metaphorical descriptions of his afflictions as "carrying in [his own] body the death of Jesus" (4:10). Paul views his sufferings as picturing, in some sense, Jesus' death. When the apostle suffers in his proclamation of the gospel before potential converts, he puts on a "Passion play" in his own body. The *conveyer* of the message pictures the *content* of the message.<sup>24</sup> As a result of this vivid portrayal, through Paul's experience of "death" by repeated suffering, he delivers "the life of Jesus"<sup>25</sup> (i.e., salvation) to his addressees (vv. 10-12).

Margaret E. Thrall takes a similar view of 2 Corinthians 4:7-15, commenting:

The apostolate is the earthly manifestation of the gospel, and apostolic suffering plays a part in this: it is the epiphany in somatic form of the Christ who was crucified. The repeated *φανερωθῆ* of vv. 10b, 11b would support this interpretation, as would the general context, which is concerned with the presentation of the gospel (4.2-5, 13).<sup>26</sup>

Likewise, Victor Paul Furnish notes about this text, "The apostle's sufferings ... are the manifestation of [Christ's] suffering and death and thus a proclamation of the gospel."<sup>27</sup>

#### **COLOSSIANS 1:24-25**

Paul develops ideas similar to those in the text above in Colossians 1:24-25, where he writes:

I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known.<sup>28</sup>

This passage presents us with a puzzling phrase. If Christ's death is sufficient to pay for the sins of the world (Rom 3:23-24; 5:17; Gal 1:4), how could

anything be “lacking” in those afflictions, and in what way could Paul “in [his] flesh,” by his sufferings, supply what is lacking (*ta husterēmata*)?

Several interpretations have been offered for this passage. For example, some scholars contend that Paul here has in mind certain “Messianic woes” that must be fulfilled before the eschaton.<sup>29</sup> It should be remembered, however, that the apostle is writing to a Gentile congregation that he has apparently never visited or written to in the past (Col 1:3-8). Although it is possible that Paul is here assuming the congregation’s background knowledge of apocalyptic Judaism, such an assumption is speculative. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that in Paul’s frequent references to suffering and hardship he never explicitly speaks of “Messianic woes,” as some Jewish sources arguably do.<sup>30</sup>

A second interpretation of Colossians 1:24-25 that has been offered is that Paul is speaking here of a “mystical” or “realistic” participation in Christ’s actual sufferings.<sup>31</sup> This interpretation, however, is unlikely. While Paul does speak of a believer’s participation in Christ’s death, that event is grasped by faith and remains “extrinsic” or “alien” to the Christian (Gal 2:20).

A third way that scholars have understood Colossians 1:24-25 is that the “lack” in verse 24 means that the persons to whom Paul proclaims the gospel lack both a knowledge and an immediate visual portrayal of Christ’s suffering and death (cf. the discussion of 2 Cor 4:7-15 above).<sup>32</sup> When Paul suffers in his proclamation of the gospel, his addressees not only learn of Christ’s sacrifice, but are allowed to see a copy (albeit imperfect) of Christ’s suffering on their behalf. Scholars who hold to this view claim that Paul’s sufferings have no atoning significance and should not be understood as manifesting the *actual* sufferings of Christ.<sup>33</sup> Yet, according to this interpretation of Colossians 1:24, Paul’s sufferings do put in the immediate vision of potential converts a persuasive portrayal of suffering in the pattern of the one who died to atone for them.<sup>34</sup>

This explanation seems reasonable (especially

noting the apparent parallel passage in 2 Cor 4:7-15) until one notices that Paul does not say that his sufferings supply what is lacking in the unevangelized world. No, his sufferings supply what is lacking among the Colossian Christians—an existing church that Paul has never visited (Col 1:4, 9, 24).

How then, does Paul make up for what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions in the Colossian church? He says that he does so by becoming a “servant of the church” according to God’s commission—to make the word of God fully known (Col 1:25). Paul proceeds to speak of his special apostolic task of unveiling the gospel in unevangelized areas (Col 1:26-29).<sup>35</sup> It is this pioneer missionizing activity that results in Paul’s suffering on behalf of the church.

In order to understand Paul’s point in Colossians 1:24-25, we must return to the point we made at the beginning of our discussion on suffering—that the fundamental grounding of Christian suffering is Christological. That is, because *all* Christians bear Christ’s presence and word, they face opposition from “the world,” which hates God and his Christ. As we noted at the beginning of this article, where Christ’s word—the gospel—is truly present, it will spread in accordance with its dynamic nature. As the gospel spreads through the church, it will encounter the hostility of the surrounding non-Christian world. This is so because the gospel announces the futility of human religions and human righteousness (Phil 3:7-9), thus arousing the anger of their adherents (Acts 9:4-5). In Colossians 1:24-25, Paul says that he is stepping ahead of the church in uncharted territory to make an initial unveiling of the gospel. In so doing, he bears the brunt of the world’s antagonism towards God and his word. As a servant of the church, he steps before her to take the first blow of the falling sword. Paul can say that such Christ-based suffering is “lacking” in regards to the church because it is the inevitable outworking of the church’s gospel-based existence. Because the word will inevitably go forth, and the world hates that word, active persecu-

tion is also inevitable. Paul willingly and joyfully steps before the church to suffer a more public and extreme persecution.<sup>36</sup>

### PHILIPPIANS

We will now briefly examine Paul's letter to the Philippians to see how the apostle describes the pattern of suffering in the community he addresses. Paul tells the Philippians, "[God] has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have" (Phil 1:29-30).<sup>37</sup> Here we note that (1) suffering is ordained by God,<sup>38</sup> (2) suffering is as much a part of the Christian experience as the divine gift of faith, and (3) the church's suffering is explicitly parallel to the "same struggle" that Paul has. In Philippians 1, Paul defines his "struggle" as the persecution and imprisonment he has faced for his proclamation of the gospel (Phil 1:12-13).

Paul assumes that the non-believers surrounding the Philippian Christians are aware of their faith, offended by it, and that is why they face persecution. There are no "secret Christians" in Philippi. As noted in the "social context" section above, the means whereby a Christian's neighbors discovered his or her new-found allegiance is somewhat speculative, but we do know that Paul consistently assumes this to be the case. This fact is probably one of the most significant reasons that we do not find more explicit injunctions to evangelism in Paul's letters. The early churches did not need to *begin* making their faith known so much as they needed to *continue* to adhere to their confession and to confirm it through their holy behavior.<sup>39</sup>

We should also note that in the Philippian correspondence, Paul reports that his personal suffering has resulted in two auspicious outcomes. (1) More people have heard of the gospel through Paul's suffering, which has brought widespread attention to his message (Phil 1:12-13),<sup>40</sup> and (2) most of the believers in the letter's city of ori-

gin have been emboldened by Paul's example to declare the gospel fearlessly (Phil 1:14).<sup>41</sup>

### FIRST AND SECOND THESSALONIANS

Paul's letters to the Thessalonian church demonstrate an understanding of persecution similar to the one we find in Philippians. Paul and his co-workers are facing opposition to their gospel proclamation (1 Thess 2:1-2); the Thessalonians encounter hostility for similar reasons, as demonstrated by 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, where Paul writes:

For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so they may be saved.

It is interesting that the Thessalonians are here described as "imitators" of churches that they have never seen. What makes them imitators is their faithful adherence to the same gospel and Lord—which results in parallel opposition from the non-believing world. Paul emphasizes this point earlier in the same letter, where he says the Thessalonians have imitated both him and the Lord by suffering for their faithful adherence to the gospel and their "sounding forth" of that word (1 Thess 1:6-8).

Turning back to 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, we note that Paul's description of the persecution of the Judean churches clarifies that this persecution was "Christ-based." The list of attacks demonstrates that the anger of "the Jews" was consistently directed against adherence to and proclamation of Jesus. These opponents are described as killing Jesus, murdering the prophets, driving out Paul and his co-workers, and hindering Paul and his co-workers from proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles. Asserting that the suffering itself was the activity being imitated begs the question. As Jo-Ann Brant rightly observes, "The equation

of ‘imitation’ with suffering affliction ignores the fact that the Thessalonians were engaged in some activity that incurred the opposition of others.<sup>42</sup>

This opposition endured by the Thessalonians, however, was not a surprise. Paul reminds the church in 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4, “Indeed, you yourselves know that [persecution] is what we are destined for. In fact, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; so it turned out, as you know.”

The Thessalonian Christians did not elicit such persistent persecution by secret adherence to a new religion. Apparently, just as in the Philippian community, a dimension of their Christian faith was publicly known and offensive to non-believers. When persons in Thessalonica believed the gospel, they did not suddenly develop a personal habit that made people want to hurt them; they suffered because people knew they had aligned themselves with a new religion that was offensive to the surrounding culture. The offensive word of God and rejected Messiah was made audible and visible through the Thessalonian church.

Other passages in Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians confirm that the surrounding pagans were aware of the Thessalonians’ faith and actively opposed them. When Paul describes the adversaries of the Thessalonians, the chief characteristic he highlights is their non-acceptance of the gospel. For example, in 2 Thessalonians 1:8, Paul describes them as “those who do not know God” and “those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” In 2 Thessalonians 2:10, Paul says that the church’s opponents have “refused to love the truth and so be saved,” and in verse 12, the apostle adds that they “have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness.” In rejecting the Thessalonian church’s offer of life, the surrounding pagan culture did not respond in apathy, but repulsion and a God-hating pagan revelry. The gospel, believed and proclaimed by the Thessalonians, was offensive. Indeed, the suffering of Christians in Thessalonica showed that their opponents were not simply set against a new religious group, but against *God and*

*his word*. Thus, God’s ultimate condemnation of these opponents is righteous and a cause for celebrating divine victory over his enemies (2 Thess 1:4-10; cf. Phil 1:28).

In summarizing the Pauline passages examined above, we should note that Paul describes both the apostles and the churches as undergoing God-ordained suffering. For the purposes of our study, this suffering is important because it reveals that the offensive, self-diffusive gospel was effectively progressing through the early Christians. As non-believers became aware of Christians’ adherence to and proclamation of the gospel, they opposed the church. Also, our study on suffering has demonstrated the continuity between the apostles’ ministry and the church’s ministry. The apostles suffer in their mission; the church experiences similar suffering.

While Paul speaks of his personal sufferings as a means whereby Christ’s atoning death is made visible to his converts (2 Cor 2:14-17; 4:8-12), he never speaks explicitly of the church’s suffering in this way.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, Paul does speak of the church’s suffering as directly paralleling his own apostolic missionary suffering (2 Cor 1:6-7; Phil 1:29-30; 1 Thess 2:13-16).<sup>44</sup> It is likely that Paul would agree that the church’s suffering also had this missiological function.<sup>45</sup> That is, the church’s suffering was not only evidence that its members were making known the gospel, but also a means of making it known.<sup>46</sup> If this is indeed Paul’s view, it is in continuity with the gospel traditions which present persecution as an opportunity for Christians to testify to the gospel before non-believers (Mark 13:9; Luke 9:23-27; 12:4-12; 21:12-13).<sup>47</sup>

It should be noted that Paul never says that Christians should actively seek suffering. Christians are, however, to welcome persecution if the alternative is being ashamed of the gospel (2 Tim 1:8). In his remarks on suffering, Paul again presents us with a classic “theological tension.” Although the suffering of Christians is ordained by God in a general sense (Phil 1:29), particular instances of suffering are something that Paul

and others can legitimately seek and pray to avoid (Acts 22:25-29; 2 Cor 1:8-11; Phil 1:19; 1 Tim 2:1-4; cf. Matt 10:23; 24:9, 15-22). The deciding factors as to whether one should embrace suffering or avoid it are (1) God's will (Phil 1:29-30), (2) the effect on others' salvation or sanctification (Phil 1:23-25; Col 1:24-25; 2 Tim 2:8-11), and (3) the glorification of God (2 Cor 4:15). Analogous to Jesus' death on the cross, the suffering of Christians brings about good (i.e., their sanctification and others' salvation) while not excusing or condoning the unjust treatment they receive (Rom 5:3-5; 8:18-19; 2 Thess 1:5-11; cf. Jas 1:2-4; Acts 2:23; 3:18-19; 4:10, 27-28; 5:28).<sup>48</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Because both the mission of the apostles and the life of the church are defined by the presence of the dynamic gospel, there is an unmistakable parallel between Paul's description of his own gospel ministry and that of his churches. When all elements of this parallelism (not just overt references to "proclamation") are taken into account, it seems reasonable to conclude that Paul thought of all but the non-repeatable functions of his apostleship as devolving upon the churches. Paul viewed the church as continuing his apostolic mission (minus non-repeatable functions).<sup>49</sup> We would expect nothing less than such missionary activity from an entity defined by the same self-diffusing gospel as its apostolic founder.

The social ramifications of the gospel's progress become especially evident in Paul's remarks on suffering. Because Christian identity is fundamentally determined by the self-diffusive, offensive gospel and the rejected Christ, all believers can expect to face the same opposition that their Lord did. It is through this suffering, however, that God has chosen to magnify the glory of his word and demonstrate the nature of its object, i.e., the crucified Christ (2 Cor 4:7-15; 6:3-10; 11:23-12:10).

In the end, the consistent pattern of suffering that we find in the early church (which parallels the suffering of the apostles) is a powerful argu-

ment for the church's missionary nature. The unwavering hostility of the outside world towards early Christians demonstrates that the dynamic (and offensive) gospel was progressing effectively through its adherents.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See my discussion of these verses in my revised, published dissertation, *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* (Paternoster Biblical Monographs; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 71-96. Much of the following discussion is directly dependent on my earlier study and I appreciate Paternoster's permission to use it.

<sup>2</sup> See "A Theological Basis for the Church's Mission in Paul," *WTJ* 64 (2002): 253-71.

<sup>3</sup> Pobee comments, "Persecutions and sufferings were a *sine qua non* of Paul's apostolic ministry" in John S. Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul* (JSNTSup 6; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 106. Hafemann agrees: "The questions of the inevitability and purpose of suffering in the life of Christians in general, and in the life of Paul as an apostle in particular, are recurring themes of great significance throughout Paul's letters" (S. J. Hafemann, "Suffering" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (eds., Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 919. Furnish writes, "Paul regards suffering not just as an occasional experience of apostles but as the essential and continuing characteristic of apostolic service" (Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB, vol. 32A [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984], 283). See also Scott J. Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit: An Exegetical Study of II Cor. 2:14-3:3 within the Context of the Corinthian Correspondence* (WUNT 2.19; Tübingen: Mohr, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> See 1 Cor 4:9-13; 15:30-32; 16:8-9; 2 Cor 1:3-10; 2:14-17; 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 11:22-28; Gal 6:17; Phil 1:14, 27-30; 3:10; Col 1:24-25; 4:3; 2 Tim 1:8, 11-12; 2:8-11; 3:10-15.

<sup>5</sup> Describing the pattern of suffering in Acts, Paul House writes, "Suffering normally follows ministry.

Then quite often suffering provides the opportunity for more ministry. Through trouble the gospel spreads from Jerusalem to Samaria (8:4-24) and finally to Rome (20:17-28:31). Paul and his coworkers seem to know when to move to other places through the opposition they arouse (cf. 13:48-52; 14:5-6; 14:19-20; 16:25-40; 17:10; 17:13-15; etc.). Indeed, it is a rare thing for the first apostles or for Paul to have assurance of safety (e.g. 9:31; 12:1-19; 18:9-11; 19:1-20) (Paul R. House, "Suffering and the Purpose of Acts," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 [1990]: 320-21). Later, House writes, "Clearly suffering is a major force in the gospel's expansion. It is a rare thing for the Way to spread without it. Various summaries in the text point to this conclusion (8:4; 9:16; 14:22; 20:22-24; 21:13; etc.), as does the flow of the book's last nine chapters. Certainly the gospel moves, but never without pain" (ibid., 326). See also Brian Rapske, "Opposition to the Plan of God and Persecution," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (eds., I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998), 235-56.

<sup>6</sup> Luke confirms that Paul viewed suffering as inherent to normal Christian existence (Acts 14:22). Also note Jesus' comment to his disciples in John 15:20, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'Servants are not greater than their master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you." Cf. Matt 5:10-12; 10:25; Mark 8:34-35; 13:9; Luke 21:12-19; John 12:25; Heb 13:12-14; Jas 1:2-4; 1 Pet 2:20-23; 3:8-9; 4:1, 12-19. Pobe comments, "Paul interprets the persecutions that were met by the various congregations in consequence of embracing the Christian message as a *sine qua non* of being in Christ" (Pobe, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 107).

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Rom 10:8-15; 1 Cor 1:23; 2:1; 9:14; 15:12; 2 Cor 1:19; 4:5; 11:4; Phil 1:12-18; Col 1:28; 4:3-4; 1 Thess 2:2.

<sup>8</sup> The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is used for English Bible citations, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>9</sup> See Winter's discussion of the "dangers of travel" in the first-century Roman empire (Bruce W. Winter, "Dangers and Difficulties for the Pauline Missions," in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mis-*

*sion* [eds., Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000], 286-88). See also Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (n.p.: George Allen & Unwin, 1974; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Raymond Chevallier, *Roman Roads* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

<sup>10</sup> See Granville Sharp's canon (*en tē thlipsei kai basileia kai hupomonē*).

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Rev 2:2-3, 9-10, 13, 19; 3:8-9.

<sup>12</sup> Adeney discusses the various religious, political, economic, and social motives behind the persecution of Christians—both in New Testament times and throughout church history (David H. Adeney, "The Church and Persecution," in *The Church in the Bible and the World: An International Study* [ed. D. A. Carson; Exeter: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987], 275-302).

<sup>13</sup> See Pliny *Epistularum* 10.96; Winter, "Dangers and Difficulties," 289-90; O. F. Robinson, *The Criminal Law of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 80.

<sup>14</sup> See *Mart. Pol.* 8.2; Dio Cassius 51.20.6-8; Winter, "Dangers and Difficulties," 292-93; Duncan Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West*, vol. 2.1, *Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), esp. 475-590; A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 402-08; Stephen Mitchell, "The Imperial Cult," in *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor*, vol. 1, *The Celts in Anatolia and the Impact of Roman Rule* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 100-17.

<sup>15</sup> See 1 Cor 1:18; Gal 3:13; Winter, "Dangers and Difficulties," 292.

<sup>16</sup> *Mart. Pol.* 9.2; Athenagoras *Supplicatio pro Christianis* 3 (F. A. March, ed., *Athenagoras*, Douglass Series of Christian Greek and Latin Writers 4 [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1876], 12); Eusebius *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.1.14; cf. Tacitus *Annals* 13.32; 15.44; Suetonius *Claudius* 25.4; *Nero* 16.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Peter D. Gooch, *Dangerous Food: 1 Corinthians 8-10 in Its Context* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism 5; Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier Uni-

versity Press, 1993), 1-46; Wendell Lee Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 63 n. 234; Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 36-42; Franz Poland, *Geschichte des griechischen Vereinswesens* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1909), 503-13. Possibly the most analogous situation in our modern context is the close-quarters and predominantly pagan environment of many universities. Christian students immediately stand out in such contexts—which may partially account for the great effectiveness of collegiate Christian movements.

<sup>18</sup>Luke consistently reports a vibrant witness by all persons in the church (e.g., Acts 4:23-31; 6:7; 8:1-4; 11:19-21; 12:24; 13:49; 15:35; 16:5; 19:10, 18-20).

<sup>19</sup>E.g., Pliny *Epistularum* 10.96; Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* 1.10.2; Tertullian *Apologeticus* 1.7; Origen *Contra Celsum* 3.55; Eusebius *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.7.1; Athenagoras *Supplicatio pro Christianis* 1; Tacitus *Annals* 13.32; 15.44; Suetonius *Claudius* 25.4; *Nero* 16; *Mart. Pol.* For additional evidence of early Christian evangelism and the concomitant persecution, see Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (ed. and trans. James Moffatt; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; London: Williams and Norgate; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), 2:1-32.

<sup>20</sup>Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1987), 10.

<sup>21</sup>Some scholars claim that when Paul lists his “catalogues of sufferings” or *Peristasenkataloge* (Rom 8:35; 1 Cor 4:10-13; 2 Cor 4:8-9; 6:4-10; 11:23-29; 12:10; Phil 4:12), he is following a conventional Hellenistic form used to legitimize a sage or leader (e.g., Plutarch *Moralia* 326D-333C; 361E-362A; 1057D-E; Epictetus *Discourses* 2.19.12-28; 4.7.13-26; Seneca *Epistulae Morales* 85.26-27). So Rudolf Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe* (FRLANT 13; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910; reprint, 1984), esp. 15-19; John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence* (SBLDS 99; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 203-07. Other scholars have proposed Jewish

apocalypticism or a mixture of Greek and Jewish elements as the background for Paul's lists of sufferings (e.g., Wolfgang Schrage, “Leid, Kreuz und Eschaton: Die Peristasenkataloge als Merkmale paulinischer theologia crucis und Eschatologie,” *EvT* 34 [1974]: 141-75; Robert Hodgson, “Paul the Apostle and First Century Tribulation Lists,” *ZNW* 74 [1983]: 59-80; Pobe, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 13-46; Susan R. Garrett, “The God of This World and the Affliction of Paul: 2 Cor 4:1-12,” in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (eds., David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, and Wayne A. Meeks; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990, 99-117). More likely, the Old Testament stories of God's suffering prophets, God's “suffering servant,” and the gospel traditions provide the background for Paul's reflections (Karl Theodor Kleinknecht, *Der leidende Gerechtfertigte: Die alttestamentlich-jüdische Tradition vom “leidenden Gerechten” und ihre Rezeption bei Paulus* [WUNT 2.13; Tübingen: Mohr, 1984]; cf. Niels Willert, “The Catalogues of Hardships in the Pauline Correspondence: Background and Function,” in *The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism* (eds., Peder Borgen and Søren Giversen; Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1995, 217-43).

<sup>22</sup>Of course, it is possible that Paul's reflections are given more generally and not in response to criticisms, though the tone of 2 Cor argues against this (e.g., 2:1-11).

<sup>23</sup>Hafemann writes, “The power of the gospel is so great and its glory so profound that it must be carried in a ‘pot,’ lest people put their trust in Paul himself” (Scott Hafemann, “‘Because of Weakness’ [Galatians 4:13]: The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul,” in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mission* [eds., Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000], 137).

<sup>24</sup>Paul possibly makes a similar reference to his suffering as a picture of Christ's death in Gal 3:1; cf. Gal 4:13; 5:11; 6:17.

<sup>25</sup>Genitive of source.

<sup>26</sup>Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, *Introduction and Commentary on II Corinthians I-VII*,

(ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 334.

<sup>27</sup>Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 284. Similar interpretations are espoused by Best, *Second Corinthians*, 43; J. Lambrecht, "The Nekrosis of Jesus: Ministry and Suffering in 2 Cor 4, 7-15," in *L'Apôtre Paul: Personnalité, Style et Conception du Ministère* (ed. A. Vanhoye; BETL 73; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 140-41; Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New International Commentary of the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 227-38; Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 184-86; cf. 1 Cor 2:1-5; 2 Cor 2:14; 12:9-10.

<sup>28</sup>For a history of interpretation of this debated passage, see Jacob Kremer, *Was an den Leiden Christi noch mangelt: Eine interpretationsgeschichtliche und exegetische Untersuchung zu Kol. 1,24b*. (BBB 12; Bonn: Hanstein, 1956), 5-154; John Reumann, "Colossians 1:24 ('What is Lacking in the Afflictions of Christ'): History of Exegesis and Ecumenical Advance," *CurTM* 17 (1990): 454-61.

<sup>29</sup>E.g., Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44; Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 78-81.

<sup>30</sup>E.g., 1 Enoch 47:1-4; 99:4; 2 Apoc. Bar. 30:1-2; 48:30-37; 70:2; *Sib. Or.* 2.154-74; see Str-B 4.977-86; cf. Dan 12:1; Zeph 1:14-15; Matt 24:8; Mark 13:5-8; Luke 21:5-11.

<sup>31</sup>E.g., C. Merrill Proudfoot, "Imitation or Realistic Participation: A Study of Paul's Concept of 'Suffering With Christ,'" *Int* 17 (1963): 140-60.

<sup>32</sup>Hafemann writes, "Paul completes what is 'lacking' in Christ's afflictions on behalf of the church in the sense that his ministry *extends* the knowledge and reality of the cross of Christ and the power of the Spirit to the Gentile world (Col 1:23; cf. Eph 3:13) (Hafemann, "Suffering," 920). Cf. W. F. Flemington, "On the Interpretation of Colossians 1:24," in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G. M. Styler by the Cambridge New Testament Seminar* (eds., William Horbury and Brian McNeil; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 84-90.

<sup>33</sup>Contra Erhardt Güttgemanns' understanding of 2

Corinthians 4:7-12 (E. Güttgemanns, *Der leidende Apostel und sein Herr: Studien zur paulinischen Christologie* [FRLANT 90; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966], 94-126). Cf. Gerhard Saß, *Apostelamt und Kirche: Eine theologisch-exegetische Untersuchung des paulinischen Apostelbegriffs* (Munich: Kaiser, 1939), 88-92; Hans Windisch, *Paulus und Christus: Eine biblisch-religionsgeschichtlicher Vergleich* (UNT 24; Leipzig: Heinrich, 1934), 236-52. For the sufficiency of Christ's atoning death, see Rom 3:21-26; 6:9-10; 8:3; 1 Cor 1:18-31; 2 Cor 5:16-21; Gal 1:4; Col 2:13-14.

<sup>34</sup>John Piper writes, "Christ's afflictions are not lacking in their atoning sufficiency. They are lacking in that they are not known and felt by people who were not at the cross. Paul dedicates himself not only to carry the message of those sufferings to the nations, but also to suffer with Christ and for Christ in such a way that what people see are 'Christ's sufferings.' In this way he follows the pattern of Christ by laying down his life for the life of the church" (Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* [2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003], 94). See Hafemann, "Because of Weakness," 131-46.

<sup>35</sup>Paul reserves his comments about the revealing of the mystery of the gospel to refer to the initial apostolic promulgation of the gospel (e.g., Rom 16:25-26; 1 Cor 2:1, 7; Eph 3:8-9; 6:19; Col 4:3-4). While Paul speaks of the churches as having the mystery of the gospel revealed to them (1 Cor 2:1, 7; Eph 1:9-10; 3:8-9; 6:19; Col 1:25-27), and of their safeguarding of that mystery (1 Tim 3:8-9), language about the churches themselves revealing the mystery is noticeably absent.

<sup>36</sup>David Garrison's comment about modern pioneer missionaries is instructive: "A list of missionaries who have been engaged in Church Planting Movements reads like a catalog of calamity. Many have suffered illness, derision and shame" (D. Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* [Richmond, VA: International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1999], 40).

<sup>37</sup>For a study of suffering in Philippians, see L. Gregory Bloomquist, *The Function of Suffering in Philip-*

prians (JSNTSup 78; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993). See also Barnabas Mary Ahern, "The Fellowship of His Sufferings (Phil 3,10): A Study of St. Paul's Doctrine of Christian Suffering," *CBQ* 22 (1960):1-32.

<sup>38</sup>See also 2 Cor 1:9; 2:14; 4:11; 2 Tim 1:11-12.

<sup>39</sup>So Douwe van Swigchem, *Het missionair karakter van de Christelijke gemeente volgens de brieven van Paulus en Petrus* (Kampen: Kok, 1955), 260.

<sup>40</sup>Indeed, there is no more persuasive means of promoting a cause than putting one's life on the line. Piper comments, "We measure the worth of a hidden treasure by what we will gladly sell to buy it ... Loss and suffering, joyfully accepted for the kingdom of God, show the supremacy of God's worth more clearly in the world than all worship and prayer" (Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!*, 71). Piper recounts several modern stories which demonstrate that a preacher who suffers in his or her proclamation of the gospel often gains a surprising number of converts (*ibid.*, 71-112). For more modern-day examples and reflections on suffering in mission, see David J. Bosch, "The Vulnerability of Mission," *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 76 (1992): 201-16.

<sup>41</sup>Bloomquist notes, "The earliest patristic references to the suffering passages of Philippians speak of two goals of martyrdom, namely, (1) to bring about the perfection of the martyr, and (2) to witness to those who observe the martyr" (Bloomquist, *Function of Suffering in Philippians*, 18). E.g., see Ign. *Rom.* 2.2; 6; 9.2; Ign. *Eph.* 3:1; 21:2.

<sup>42</sup>Jo-Ann A. Brant, "The Place of *mimésis* in Paul's Thought," *SR* 22 (1993): 292.

<sup>43</sup>Paul does speak of the Thessalonians' suffering as "evidence of the righteous judgment of God" (2 Thess 1:5). By this statement, Paul apparently means that because the Thessalonians' opponents are ruthlessly persecuting them, it is clear to all that God is righteous in bring-

ing destruction on those opponents (1:5-9).

<sup>44</sup>Paul viewed the suffering of apostle and church as parallel because of their similar relationship to two entities—the Word of God and the world (1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 3:1).

<sup>45</sup>So Lambrecht, "The Nekrósis of Jesus," 143; contra Walter Schmithals, *The Office of Apostle in the Early Church* (trans. John E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon, 1969), 48.

<sup>46</sup>Sloan writes, "Thus, what the church endures by way of suffering in this present evil age is both an evangelistic witness [2 Cor 4:15] and a witness to the world of the coming, righteous judgment of God (2 Thess. 1:4-10)" (Robert B. Sloan, "Images of the Church in Paul," in *The People of God: Essays on the Believers' Church* [eds., Paul Basden and David S. Dockery; Nashville: Broadman, 1991], 164).

<sup>47</sup>O'Toole claims that Luke presents Paul's ministry in Acts as a fulfillment of Christ's predictions that believers would testify in their sufferings for the gospel. See especially Acts 25:1-26:32 (Robert F. O'Toole, "Luke's Notion of 'Be Imitators of Me as I am of Christ,' in Acts 25-26," *BTB* 8 [1978]: 155-61).

<sup>48</sup>See a previous edition of this journal that focused on the topic of suffering: *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4:2 (Summer 2000). Also, several of Hafemann's previous studies on suffering are nicely synthesized in Scott Hafemann, "The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul," in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles* (eds., Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein; Tübingen: Mohr, 2000), 165-84.

<sup>49</sup>Thus, Norbert Schmidt is correct to conclude, "On the pages of the New Testament we do not find an explicit theology of mission, but the implicit commission initially given to the Apostles can be found in many forms with respect to the Church" (Norbert Schmidt, "The Apostolic Band—A Paradigm for Modern Missions?" [Th.M. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1985], 77).