

Colossians 1:24-29 and Its Challenges to Ministries in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria is said to be one of the most religious countries in the world. Ironically, it is also said to be one of the most corrupt countries according to global record. These corruption allegations unfortunately include many church ministers in the country, who are known for establishing ministries for exploitative purposes. Their victims, which largely include unsuspecting innocent people, are predominantly poor citizens who are already bearing the weight of socio-political and economic decay and issues of insecurity in the country. Because of the uncertainties arising from the situations, these poor masses look for succour in what they think are “houses of God,” and they are taken advantage of by these ministers who ask them to donate unreasonable sums to fund their luxurious lifestyles. St. Paul on the other hand, explains in Colossians 1:24-29 how, rather than fleece these believers, he would prefer to suffer for their good. The paper takes analysis this passage from a historical and theological approach and uses the Pauline model to challenge church ministers in Nigeria to be truthful, genuine and sincere in serving God and his people.

Key words: Colossians, ministries, ministers of the Word, suffering, calvary way

1. Introduction

Nigeria is said to be the most religious and the most corrupt countries of the world according to global record. These corruption accusations unfortunately include church ministers in the country who establish ministries for exploitative purposes. The roles of such ministers are neither religious, political nor social¹ but commercial for their selfish ends. Their targets are largely unsuspecting innocent people who are predominantly poor citizens; already bearing the weight of socio-political and economic decay as well as issues of insecurity in the country.² These are citizens that have been humiliated, pauperized and reduced to a state of destitution by unconcerned politicians interested only in maintaining their political positions.³ They are already still suffering untold hardship at the hand of despotic, visionless and reckless government; and daily dying, as it were, at the hands of herdsmen, kidnappers, bandits, Boko Haram and the rest; with no one to help them. And in the church, their only place of hope and succour, they are being exploited by those who are supposed to suffer with and for the people.

This is clearly in contrast to what Paul says about Christian ministry and Christian ministers in Col 1:24-29 with reference to his activities among the Colossians. Paul rejoices to suffer for the sake of the Colossian

¹ Emmanuel O. Nworu, *The Man of God in the Bible and Extra-Biblical Traditions* (Nsukka: Afro-Orbis Publishers, 2007), 28.

² George Ehusani, *Nigeria: Years Eaten by the Locust* (Ibadan: Kraft Book Limited, 2002), 6.

³ Ehusani, *Years Eaten by the Locust*, 7.

Christians; and explains how eager he is to complete what is lacking in Jesus' suffering for the sake of the church. Being a minister divinely chosen, Paul is willing to make the word of God fully known and to proclaim by way of warning and teaching everyone in all wisdom so as to present mature followers to Christ. This text stands completely at variance to present day ministers who preach a cross less Christianity. They tell their followers that "suffering is not their potion" and conclude that those who suffer are either sinful or those who fail to contribute generously to the ministry. They convince their hearers to pay up their tithes and make huge donations to avert suffering and to ensure a life of prosperity.⁴

2. Pauline Authorship/Date

The Letter to the Colossians has been classified as one of the Pauline imprisonment Epistles because, it appears to have been written while Paul was in detention like the case of Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon (Col 4:3, 10, 18; cf. 1:24).⁵ Many scholars debated against the authenticity of Pauline authorship of the Letter to the Colossians, basing their arguments on theology,

⁴ Luke E. Ijezie, "Critique against the Commercialization of Religion, in Micah 3:5-12 and it's Contemporary Resonance," in Bernard Ukwuegbu et al (eds.), *Acts of CABAN 5* (2014), 93-110 (93).

⁵ D. N. Freedman, "Colossians", *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Vol. 1 (New York: Yale University Press, 1992) 1090-1096 (1090).

vocabulary, style and situations that are reflected in the letter. ⁶

The strongest case for the authenticity of Pauline authorship is the similarities between Colossians and the letter to Philemon. Timothy is noted as Paul's partner in both letters. The conclusion of these arguments is that Paul authored Colossians. Its date of writing is placed between, A.D. 60-62 the timeframe for the other three "prison epistles," leading scholars to believe the possibility of Paul writing all four "prison epistles" namely: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.⁷

3. The Structure of Colossians 1:24-29

The overall structure of the letter to the Colossians is of a typical Pauline letter made up of an address, a thanksgiving paragraph, the body of the letter with affirmations and exhortations closely related and finally conclusion with various personal data, greetings, and a benediction.⁸ The Text of Col 1:24-29 has a tail-head link with Col 1:21-23, wherein the topic of Paul's ministry mentioned at the tail of v. 23 is expanded upon at the head of v. 24ff. This paragraph is part of the grounds contained in Col 1:15-2:5 for the exhortations to

⁶ Cesar A. Mora Paz, "Colossians", *The International Bible Commentary*: Ed. William R. Farmer (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998) 1697-1709 (1698).

⁷ Scott Hahn, "Colossians", *Catholic Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 2009) 157-159 (158).

⁸ Freedman, "Coossians", 1092.

come in 2:6ff. Colossians 1:24-29 is connected logically with 2:1-5 as Paul's ministry is the topic of both paragraphs. It refers more generally to Paul's ministry to the Colossians and the church as a whole, whereas Col 2:1-5 narrows the focus and specifically describes Paul's ministry among the Colossian and Laodicean churches in particular.

Structurally, Col 1:24-29 is one sentence in Greek with four primary headings, each of the last three starting with a relative pronoun. These could be summarized propositionally as follows:

- "I am rejoicing in my sufferings for you...and am completing what is lacking in Christ's affliction" (v. 24);
- "I have become a minister of the church...to make the Word of God fully known" (v. 25-27);
- "We proclaim Him" (v. 28); and
- "I labour for this" (v. 29).

Commentators note the similarity between the content of vv. 25-27 and verse 28, each of which focus on Paul's proclamation of the gospel, and thus often group these verses together. Therefore, the paragraph could be divided into three parts: benefit of suffering (v. 24), ministers of the word (v. 25-28), and the word proclaimed (v. 29).

4. Analysis of the Text

4.1 Benefits of Suffering (Colossians 1:24)

Colossians 1:24 indicates that Paul's ministry to the church was a ministry marked by suffering. The verse contains two present active indicatives recounting the nature of Paul's suffering. First, Paul says, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake" (v. 24a). That is, in the midst of Paul's suffering, he rejoices because it is for their sake. Second, Paul states, "And in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (v. 24b). In addition to the fact that his suffering is for the benefit of the church, Paul saw his suffering as a continuance in some sense of the suffering of Christ, which therefore motivated his rejoicing.⁹

What was Christ's suffering "lacking"? How could anything be lacking in Christ's afflictions? Was not his suffering and death for the world utterly all-sufficient? So what does Paul mean in v. 24 and how does it apply to us? There may be a contextual clue in Paul's immediate reference to his ministry of gospel proclamation in v. 25ff, indicating perhaps that the only thing lacking in Christ's suffering is its repute.¹⁰

But to see v. 24 properly, it is good to look at it in connection with the rest of the pericope. Starting at v. 29,

⁹ F. W. Beare & G. P. Macleod, "Colossians", *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), 146-241 (177).

¹⁰ Paz, "Colossians", 1703.

it may be meaningful to go backward and sum up what Paul is saying in this paragraph. V. 29: Paul says that there is a purpose for which he labours.¹¹ And the striving, the agonizing, of this labour is not merely his own energy. It is the power of Christ mightily working in him. Verse 28 describes the purpose that Paul labours for, namely, to present everyone that he reaches “Mature in Christ.” And he does this by proclaiming Christ; warning and teaching everyone. This is Paul’s ceaseless labour which Christ energizes. “The double function of ‘warning’ and ‘teaching’ corresponds to the twofold training of the Christian, in conduct and advancing in knowledge”.¹²

Verses 26–27 define more explicitly what Paul proclaims and teaches. It is called a “mystery” in v. 26, not because it can’t be understood, but because it has been hidden for ages and has now been revealed to the saints. Then v. 27 describes the riches of the glory of this mystery. It is “Christ in you (Gentiles), the hope of glory”. What was not revealed fully in past ages was that the Jewish Messiah who is the Christ, would actually reach out to non-Jewish nations and indwell among non-Jewish people, that he would actually live in them and give them the promise of Abraham, the hope of glory in the kingdom of God with all the saints.¹³

¹¹ S. Fowl, “Colossians”, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*: Ed. F. F. Bruce (Michigan: Grand Rapids 1990), 3-187 (88).

¹² Beare & Macleod, “Colossians”, 182.

¹³ Fowl, “Colossians”, 84.

But now the mystery is being revealed and Paul is proclaiming Christ and teaching everywhere that the indwelling of the Messiah and the hope of the glory of God belong to all who trust Christ and really hope in the glory of God (Col 1:4, 23). The afflictions are lacking in the sense that they are not seen and known among the gentile nations. They must be carried by ministers of the word. “Paul’s special stewardship of this mystery involves its disclosure to Gentiles”.¹⁴

4.2 Ministers of the Word (Colossians 1:25-28)

Verses 25-28 describe the reason and purpose for Paul’s ministry. Paul became a servant (*diakonos*) of the church (v. 25) because of the stewardship (*oikonomian*) God gave him.¹⁵ The infinitive in v. 25 gives the purpose of Paul’s ministry: “to make the Word of God fully known”. Verses 26-27 modifies and gives definition to what Paul means by his use of “the Word of God.” Namely, it is the “mystery hidden for ages...but now revealed” (v. 26). Verse 27 gives the description of the mystery, that it is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Verse 28 contains a present active indicative: “We proclaim Him.” The relative pronoun’s antecedent is “Christ” in v. 27. Christ is the content of Paul’s preaching. Verse 28 contains two participles explaining the manner in which Paul proclaims Christ: by “warning” and “teaching”. Paul’s reference to the Gentiles in v. 27 and his repetition of the term

¹⁴ Fowl, “Colossians”, 86.

¹⁵ Beare & Macleod, “Colossians”, 179.

“everyone” (*panta*, used three times in v. 28), emphasizes the fact that Paul’s preaching was to people from every ethnic background, Jew and Gentile alike.¹⁶

The end of v. 28 includes a purpose statement, indicated by a *hina* clause that functions as both the purpose of Paul’s proclamation in v. 28 as well as the purpose of Paul’s labour in v. 29: “so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.” Paul’s goal in preaching was to present every member of the church in maturity to the Lord.

4.3 The Word Proclaimed (Colossians 1:29)

Verse 29 references this very same purpose in relation to Paul’s labour. Paul uses a preposition and a relative pronoun to connect the statement “I labour” to the preceding purpose of presenting everyone mature in Christ. Paul commends his ministry by explaining that he worked hard for the sake of producing maturity in the believers. The participle in v. 29b describes the means by which Paul was able to labour: “striving according to His power that works powerfully in me” (Col 1:29). Paul uses a mnemonic word play to emphasize the power of God that was operative in his ministry: “His power that works powerfully” (*energeian auto ten energoumenen*).¹⁷ The only way Paul was capable of ministering in the way he did – suffering, proclaiming,

¹⁶ Fowl, “Colossians”, 87.

¹⁷ Beare & Macleod, “Colossians”, 183.

and labouring – was because the power of God is at work in him.¹⁸

5. Theological Reflection on the Text

5.1 Willingness to Suffer for the Church (Colossians 1:24a)

The Christian life involves as well as requires suffering and Jesus made it very clear from the onset that anyone who wishes to be his follower must deny herself /himself, take up her/his cross and follow him. Suffering should be the attitude of every minister. A minister knows s/he must drink the cup of suffering until the time of Christ's return, and s/he drinks it willingly. A minister does not desire it or ask for it but submits to the will of the Father. "Just as Christ endured what he had to suffer in accordance with the father's design (John. 17:4; 19:30) so his members must share in his afflictions until the plan of God is fulfilled..."¹⁹

Colossians is a prison epistle; therefore, when Paul writes this letter he is under house arrest in Rome, chained next to a Roman guard twenty-four hours a day. He willingly suffered for Christ and his church as he sought to spread the gospel to every part of the ancient world. An effective minister of Christ is willing to suffer for Christ's body. Suffering will always be present, and

¹⁸ Fowl, "Colossians", 88.

¹⁹ Paz, "Colossians", 1702.

those who choose to avoid suffering cannot be effective for Christ.²⁰ A Christian can choose to live a life avoiding all sacrifice and suffering. They can choose not to get involved with others' problems. They can choose not to bear the weight of serving or the scorn from being bold for Christ, and yes, they may go to heaven, but they will go to heaven alone without producing much fruit.

5.2 Servants of the Church (Colossians 1:25b)

Paul said in Col 1:25 that he had become the church's servant by the commission of God. The word minister means *doulos* servant.²¹ Jesus himself states: "For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Every effective minister must be a servant, for it is fundamental to ministry. However, it is good to note that not all ministers are truly servants. It is very possible for ministers to seek to be served in the church instead of serving.

Most ministers have what can be called 'a consumer mind'. These are people who think of what they can get from ministries and not what they can give. The disciples are not left in this consumer mind for in Luke 22, they were arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom. Christ rebuked them vehemently when He

²⁰ J. F. MacArthur Jr., *New Testament Commentary: Colossians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 74.

²¹ Stephen D. Renn, "*Servant*," in idem (ed.), *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Massachusetts: Henrickson Publisher, 2005), 877-879.

said: “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them ... But not so with you, rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves ... But I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:25-27). Jesus affirmed, that even though the world’s model of leadership is about ruling and being served, it will not be that way with his disciples. The greatest among them should be the servant of all.

Peter advised the elders: “Tend the flock of God that is in your charge, not by constrain but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:2-3). Peter enumerated three vices common to leadership. *Feeling constrained* instead of willingly serving, *being greedy* for money instead of being eager to serve, and *lording over people* instead of being examples to the flock. Like Peter, ministers must be servants of the church, seeking the interests of others rather than their own.

5.3 Faithful Stewards of the Word of God (Colossians 1:25-27)

Paul in the above text declared that he was a faithful steward of the Word of God. A steward *iokonomos* was a servant placed over the house of a master. While the master was gone, he would oversee everything in the house.²² Paul declared himself and the other apostles as

²² Renn, *Steward*, 931-932 (931).

stewards of the Word of God. In 1 Cor 4:1. Paul states: “this is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor 4:1-2).

A faithful steward of the word of God seeks to present the word of God in its fullness (cf. Col 1:25). Affirming this, Paul said to the Ephesian elders in the book of Acts: “Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God” (Acts 20:26-27). Paul knew that if he did not teach the whole counsel of God, or if he hid certain doctrines for fear of anger or being rejected by men, God would hold him responsible. In the same vein, ministers of today must speak the whole counsel of God to those around them, or they would be held responsible.

A faithful steward of the Word of God shares the Mystery with everybody: “The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations but is now disclosed to the saints”. To them, God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles “the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:26-27). One of the responsibilities of faithful stewards of God’s Word is sharing the mystery with everybody. The word “mystery” *mysterion* used in the New Testament has the connotation of something previously unrevealed or not fully revealed in the Old Testament but which was made plain. The mystery Paul was focusing on was the gospel coming to the Gentiles and Christ living in them. He said the riches of this mystery is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (v. 27).

In the Old Testament, nobody knew that the Messiah would come and indwell people, and, even more so, they never thought this would happen to the Gentiles specifically. Paul mentioned this when he states: “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph 3:6).

The Gentiles could be saved in the Old Testament, but they never had the same privileges as the Jews. The Jews were called to be ministers who won Gentiles to God, but as God’s chosen people they had greater privileges. These divisions made the Jews proud, creating great animosity between Jews and Gentiles. However, in the New Covenant these divisions have been removed. Jews and Gentiles are fellow heirs of the promise in Christ. For Paul, a Jew, to give his life reaching the Gentiles was phenomenal. Despite what separated them: ethnicity, culture, and religion, Paul was given stewardship to reach not only Jews, but also those who were far away from God, the Gentiles.

The followers of Christ today are called to the same thing: to be faithful stewards of the Word of God and share it with everybody, no matter the race, culture, or socio-economic status. It was said of Christ that he was the friend of sinners (Matt 16:19). He went to areas and to people who were not accepted. He was a faithful steward of the Word. Ministers like Jesus and Paul, must be willing to stretch themselves out of their comfort zone to reach even those who would seem unreachable.

5.4 Present Mature Followers to Christ (Colossians 1:28)

Paul's goal in ministering was to present everyone perfect in Christ. However, the question to ask is: "Can anyone be perfect?" Certainly, no one can ever get to the point where s/he never sins. When Paul uses this word, he is talking about being mature in Christ, this is the very ministry God calls pastors and teachers to do in the church. Ephesians 4:11-13 states: "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, ... teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for work of ministry, for building up body of Christ, until we all attain ...to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

One of a minister's job is to see all the potentials in young Christians and help them discern God's call for their lives and the things God wants them to do. Ministers are to invest in the young Christians so that they start to mature in the Word of God; to do the works of service they were called to do. To help people to grow and mature, Ministers must continually point them to Christ and his example. They are the example of how to handle persecutions, how to pray, how to live a life of faith and to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

A second way of developing mature Christians is by minister's admonishing others of which Paul is an example. A crucial part of Paul's ministry was warning the church about sin. This is often the very area at which ministers fail in seeking to develop mature members.

The manner in which ministers admonish and confront sin is very important. Paul asserts: “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the Head, into Christ...” (Eph 4:15). By speaking the truth in love, the church grows up and is made mature. Ministers must confront their sisters and brothers and tell the truth in love. Ministers must be warned and also warn their sisters and brothers against the negative attraction and glamour of riches.²³

A third way for developing mature Christians is by teaching practically. “Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man mature in Christ” (Col 1:28). Paul declared that he taught everyone with all wisdom. Wisdom is the application of knowledge. Wisdom is the “So what?” to the Bible study or the sermon. Wisdom tells the Christian what to do with what the Scripture says.

Effective ministers must apply the word of God to depression, lust, decision-making, dating, marriage, etc. Paul wrote to Timothy thus: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). The doctrines of Scripture are useful for “training in righteousness” and “for every good work.” The minister must use wisdom in applying the Word of

²³ Anthony I. Umoren, “Liberating the Poor as Jesus’ Evangelization Approach in Luke 4:18-19: Lessons for the Nigerian Church,” in Bernard Ukwuegbu et al (eds.), *Acts of CABAN*, 6 (2015), 109-130 (121).

God to every situation. By doing this, the minister helps the Christians to grow and mature.

5.5 Willingness to Work Hard (Colossians 1:29a)

“To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Col 1:29). The word “labour” means to “work to exhaustion”. There is a holy labour that every Christian must take part in. Paul pressed or laboured “for others to reach perfection”. That was Christ’s call on his life.²⁴ Paul describes his ministry thus: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (1 Cor 15:10). Paul relied on God’s grace that enabled him to work hard. Like Paul, God has given everybody sufficient and abundant grace to accomplish his will. Paul worked hard using the grace that God had given him. Paul’s ministerial drive is a model for present-day ministers. They will never have an authentic, apostolic ministry unless they are willing to work to the point of exhaustion. Present-day minister must be challenged by Paul’s apostolic labour and the labour of other effective ministers. They must decide to work hard in serving God as well.

One of the areas that ministers are to work hard is in studying and teaching the Word of God. Paul uses the same word for “labour to exhaustion” about the preaching of God’s Word when he says, “The elders who

²⁴ Beare & Macleod. *Colossians*, 146-241 (183).

direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1 Tim 5:17). The term “work” means to “labour to exhaustion.” In this text, Paul makes the argument that these elders should be paid because of their labour. However, ministers should work hard in the study and teaching of God’s Word. Again, Scripture says, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15).

A second area that ministers are to work hard is in disciplining the body. “But I beat my body and subdue it lest after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27). What does Paul mean when he says that he “beat” his body? What it means literally in Greek is “to hit under the eye.”²⁵ This means that Paul figuratively gave his body a black eye to control it. Athletes are taught to control their body and make it do what they want it to do. Paul affirms that the rigours and disciplines of an athlete are needed to be a strong Christian. It is good to note that many Christians are ineffective in their spiritual life because they have never learned how to control their body and make it their slave. They do not work hard at disciplining both their body and their mind to honour God.

A third area to work hard in, is Prayer. “For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you, and for those at

²⁵ J. F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Corinthians*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 215.

Laodicea, and for all who have not seen my face...” (Col 2:1). When Paul said he strove for the Colossians, he probably meant that he was struggling in prayer for them. He had never met them personally as he was in prison in Rome (Col 2:1). In Colossians 1:9-14, he describes his prayers for this congregation whom he had never seen.

In the same way, ministers of God must strive/struggle and labour in prayer for others to become mature in Christ. Most Christians never push their prayer life. But it needs to be pushed. Christ made the disciples pray for one hour, then another hour, then another hour (Matt 26:38-45). He challenged them to work hard in prayer. Ministers of God must do the same.

A fourth area that a minister can work hard at, is to work hard at everything they do. “Whatever your task, work heartedly, as serving the Lord, and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive an inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ” (Col 3:23-24).

5.6 Rely on God’s Power (Colossians 1:29b)

“For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me” (Col 1:29). One of the characteristics of effective ministers is that they rely on the power of God. This would seem to be something that doesn’t need to be said; however, many present-day ministers fail in this area. It is very easy to be consumed with ministry and yet do it in their own power and many

times for their own glory.²⁶ One way for minister to possess the power of God is to be intimate with Christ who instructed to his disciples: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself; unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ‘I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5).

All true ministry and true power flows out of an intimate relationship with God. Like the story of Mary and Martha, it is very easy for the ministers to focus entirely on ministry and forget to stay at the Lord’s feet (Luke 10:38-42). Many Christians are doing many good things, but their many good things are keeping them from the best thing—sitting at Jesus’ feet.

All power comes from an intimate relationship with God, abiding in his Word and prayer. In fact, one time the disciples tried to cast out a demon but could not, even though Christ had given them power (cf. Luke 9:1). They asked Christ why and he said, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:29b). The disciples might have forgotten to pray in the midst of casting out the demon. Most probably, after seeking to cast him out and failing, they might have started asking God for power and grace. It seems that they might have lacked a living, abiding relationship with God through prayer.

²⁶ Ijezie, “Critique against the Commercialization of Religious Ministries”, 93.

6. Challenges of Colossians 1:24-29 to Ministries in Nigeria

Paul's approach to ministry among the Christians of Colossae presents enormous challenges to all who make claim to being Christian ministers in Nigeria today. Among other things, it challenges them to be genuine and authentic servants that will defend and explain the hope that is in them in the midst of being under siege by an abusive, exploitative fraudulent, insensitive, callous and greedy elite and government. Ministries should challenge the status-quo and those who are satisfied with it. They must be committed to the interest of the poor, the oppressed, the internally displaced persons and victims of religious and ethnic cleansing. Ministers are challenged to come to the aid of those hungry for bread as well as those hungry for justice in solidarity with those hungering for bread. They are challenged to be ministers of service, ones that minister to the profound needs of the people, including their spiritual, moral, and material needs. Founders of ministries are challenged to be committed in word and deed to the ideals of the kingdom which Jesus Christ preached.

Other challenges presented by Col 1:24-29 for ministers/ministries in Nigeria include: willingness to suffer, and making sacrifices and offer their lives in committed and daily cross-carrying; being ready to serve without counting the cost; being true stewards and custodians of God's Word; willingness to work hard and to eschew all forms of laziness, slothfulness and procrastination. Again, ministers are challenged to be more interested in the growth and progress of others and

to avoid any form of competition; to rely on the power of God, and to work on the energy that comes from God fuelled by daily life of prayer and an active sacramental life. They should also be disposed and willing to collaborate and cooperate with the different ministries in the church rather than duplicating ministries and to encourage and harness individual and collective charisms.

7. Conclusion

If there is anything that comes out from our exposition of the text of Col 1:24-29, it is the fact that God is calling ministers to live for the sake of the gospel and to do that through suffering as Paul did. Christ chose suffering; suffering didn't just happen to him. He chose it as the way to create and perfect the church. Paul also followed Christ's example and rejoices over his suffering. Now he calls ministers to choose suffering, that is, to take up their cross and follow him on the Calvary Road and deny themselves and make sacrifices for the sake of presenting his suffering to the world and ministering to the church, to his people.

If Christ's cross can be said to be for propitiation; then the suffering of the ministers and those of his followers is for propagation. That is, Christ suffered to accomplish salvation; ministers suffer to spread salvation. And their willingness to endure hardship for the good of others is a filling up of Christ's afflictions because it extends salvation to others and makes salvation visible in and through their ministry.