

The background of the cover is a scenic landscape. In the foreground, there are tall, thin grasses in shades of yellow and pink. Behind them are several large, dark green evergreen trees. The middle ground is filled with a dense forest of smaller evergreen trees. In the background, there are several layers of mountains, with the closest ones being a deep blue and the ones further away becoming increasingly hazy and light blue. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and purple, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The sun is visible on the left side, partially obscured by the mountains.

Christ in You The Hope of Glory

A study in Colossians

Patrick J. Griffiths

“Christ in You, the Hope of Glory”

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Waukesha Bible Church
553 W24079 Glendale Road
Waukesha, Wisconsin 53189
www.waukeshabible.org

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Christ In You, the Hope of Glory

Readings from the Book of Colossians

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Introduction

God created us so that we might know and experience the joy he has within himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and this joy is only known and experienced in his presence.

Colossians sits in this ancient legacy anchoring us to Genesis and reaching forward into Revelation. In a strange way, God's vision for the joy of his people is under assault. Those who declare Jesus necessary but not enough undermine the sufficiency and sovereignty of Jesus. If one listens closely, they will hear the hiss of the Garden's serpent.

Not only is the glory of his person being deconstructed, but also the joy for his people. The joy God designed for his people can only be known in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The Book of Colossians forms one of the most transparent revelations of Jesus Christ found within Holy Scripture. The veil has been rent and we are privileged and exposed to a full portrayal of who he is and what he has done for his people. Here, the recipient celebrates the high-standing status of Jesus. Words like supremacy and preeminence are often employed to describe this ascended standing. What prompts Paul to write such impregnated words? Simply put, the church is under siege. Those who would undermine the person and work of Jesus destabilize the church by subverting the gospel.

“Paul never explicitly describes the false teaching he opposes in the Colossian letter. The nature of the heresy must be inferred from statements he made in opposition to the false teachers. An analysis of his refutation suggests that the heresy was diverse in nature. Some of the elements of its teachings were:

1. *Ceremonialism*. It held to strict rules about the kinds of permissible food and drink, religious festivals (2:16-17) and circumcision (2:11; 3:11).
2. *Asceticism*. "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" (2:21; cf. 2:23).
3. *Angel worship*. See 2:18.
4. *Depreciation of Christ*. This is implied in Paul's emphasis on the supremacy of Christ (1:15-20; 2:2-3, 9).
5. *Secret knowledge*. The Gnostics boasted of this (see 2:18 and Paul's emphasis in 2:2-3 on Christ, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom").
6. *Reliance on human wisdom and tradition*. See 2:4, 8.

These elements seem to fall into two categories, Jewish and Gnostic. It is likely, therefore, that the Colossian heresy was a mixture of an extreme form of Judaism and an early stage of Gnosticism."¹

Yet, it is because of this direct assault against the joy of his people and the glory of his person that Paul pours forth this significant declaration. Here we read of our Lord's preeminent position in creation (1:15-18). He continues by celebrating the preeminent position of Jesus in redemption (1:19-23) and finally, his preeminent position in the church (1:24-2:3).

By calling the church back to the preeminence of Jesus, the church is free from enticing words (2:4-7), vain philosophy (2:8-10), the judgment of others (2:11-17), improper worship (2:18, 19), and the fabricated and imposing teaching of extra-biblical instruction (2:20-23).

¹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nkjv/colossians/>

Paul openly speaks of the Jesus Seed producing Gospel Fruit. Everything Paul calls the church to (chapters 3, 4) flows from the root of the gospel (chapters 1, 2). The flow of the gospel is one way. The work of Jesus flows into and through his church.

Often, as is true with most of our handling of God's Word, we read various pieces without seeing how the pieces fit into the bigger picture. This is unfortunate and denigrating. Paul is not jumping from subject matter to subject matter as if there is no coherent thought and intentional design. Each of the verses and paragraphs form a thread in a beautiful tapestry. Each is a different color used by God to paint a breathtaking portrait of his Son. To understand the parts, you must understand the whole. The parts make up the whole, and the whole brings continuity to the individual parts. We will do an injustice to the revelation of God if we fail to see each part in light of the whole.

The task is not difficult, but in our time and culture, we have become intellectually lazy. The difficulty lies in our own inability to focus for extended periods on a singular thought. Perhaps if we identified what is Paul's primary point, we will be able to see how the parts fit into the whole. Paul's primary thought is, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

Each of the following twelve readings is built around its paragraph. An attempt has been made to "connect the dots" within the book itself, thereby presenting the book as a whole.

Colossians is a celebration of the resurrected Christ. He lived, died, was buried and on the third day he arose from the grave. He appeared to his witnesses, ascended to the right hand of his Father, and now sits exalted over his church and creation.

Paul's overarching intent is to provide the church with this unmatched picture of an exalted Christ that faces the siege by her enemies and puts down every stronghold that seeks to exalt itself over the ascended Christ. It is in this context, these writings are offered to a thirsty church.

As with any study, there are implications because of my own inability. I have, however, been enriched by my personal journey in and through the book itself. By design, it has led me to Jesus. I trust you will find, celebrate, and declare that he is enough, in this life and in the life to come. May the Holy Spirit use these words to free his church by seeing her resurrected and exalted Savior.

1

To the Saints and Faithful Brothers in Christ

*“To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father” (Col. 1:2).*

Read Colossians 1:1, 2

The letter to the Colossian church begins with a startling statement: “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ.” Paul identifies the recipients of his letter as “saints and faithful.” We must remember that Paul did not live in a global community. He did not have modern technology with instant messaging, emailing, cable television, satellite dish, and radio. Paul, in many ways, had no idea what was happening among his brothers and sisters in Christ at Colossae. Paul did not believe the people to whom he wrote were perfect in their obedience. In fact, he writes to them because he heard of a theological problem within the believing community that needed correction. He knew there were constant struggles, failures, confusion, and doubt. Nonetheless, Paul looked past their checkered performance and noted their glorious position in Christ.

In his desire to make clear the meaning of the text, Pastor Eugene Petersen translates our passage in the following manner.

¹ “I, Paul, have been called and sent by Jesus, the Messiah, according to God’s plan, along with my friend Sosthenes. ² I send

this letter to you in God's church at Corinth, **Christians cleaned up by Jesus and set apart for a God-filled life.** I include in my greeting all who call out to Jesus, wherever they live. He's their Master as well as ours!" (*The Message*)

As such, he identifies his audience with two qualifiers: **They are saints and they are faithful.** The word "saints" is the same word used to describe anything holy such as in "the Holy Spirit." It means, "To be blameless, sacred, and ceremonially clean, set apart." This is what the saints are in Christ. Being a saint is not based on performance, but on position.

Being a saint is not based on performance, but on position.

He equally identifies his audience as being faithful. Our faithfulness is based on God's power, not our performance. The Scriptural call to faithfulness flows *from* faithfulness not *for* faithfulness. The believer will struggle to *be* faithful in his performance, only because he *is* faithful in his position. The struggle in performance is because the believer *is* faithful. The unfaithful do not struggle to evaluate their performance.

We read this same thought in 1 Corinthians. The people of Corinth are identified as a struggling people. They are marked by failure and disappointment. Paul writes the letters to the church at Corinth and Colossae to deal with specific sin issues within the family of God. The concerns in Colossae were theological; the ones in Corinth were moral. Nonetheless, Paul opens the letter with the following identifier.

² "To the church of God which is at Corinth, **to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling,** with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ I thank my God

always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,⁵ **that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge,**⁶ even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you,⁷ so that **you are not lacking in any gift,** awaiting eagerly the revelation of **our Lord Jesus Christ,**⁸ **who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.** ⁹ **God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord**" (1 Cor. 1:2-9).

Let this truth wash over the people of God. In the desire and struggle for personal holiness, let us not forget that we are working *from* holiness, not *for* holiness. As the people of God, we are saints and are faithful in Christ despite our failure. This is what God determined would be the outcome of his Son's person and work. This is the embodiment of the *Story*. He would secure for himself a people who are both saints and faithful.

Such truth is to strengthen our resolve to remember that our victory over the temporal is rooted in the unchanging eternal Son of God. Our despair will be real when we separate what we are in Christ from what we do. We do not excuse failure or delight in the same, but what we do is "keep looking to Jesus who is both the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2).

Thus, I greet you as saints and the faithful. I see Christ in you. Continue to enjoy the reign of his grace. Continue to understand all that he is for you and who you are in him.

Do not give up, but rather continue to stand fast in the grace wherein he has set you free (Gal. 5:1).

2

The Hope Laid Up for you in Heaven

“Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel” (Col. 1:5).

Read Colossians 1:3-8

In this initial paragraph, Paul speaks to the community of faith, a family of families. He speaks of their faith in Christ, love for one another and the cause of all this, the hope laid up for them in heaven. This hope is the gospel and it is the gospel that produces the faith, love, and hope generated in and through those it saves. Paul includes in his opening comments three words found throughout the New Testament: faith, love, and hope (1 Cor. 13:13; 1 Thess. 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:21, 22).

¹³“But now **faith, hope, love**, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13).

⁸“But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of **faith** and **love**, and as a helmet, the **hope** of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8).

²¹ “who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your **faith** and **hope** are in God. ²² Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere **love** of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart” (1 Pet. 1:21, 22).

Faith sees the invisible, love embraces the intolerable, and hope believes the impossible. Hope believes change is coming. Hope lightens the load. When all appears to be lost,

hope believes help is on the way. The opposite of hope is despair. Despair exists because we do not believe anything will ever change. Hope believes change is both certain and inevitable. Hope is so confident of change that it infuses the present with soul-quickening rest despite the crushing circumstances surrounding the individual.

As believers, we are constantly reminded that the best is yet to come. Sin has made certain that

Faith sees the invisible,
love embraces the intolerable,
and hope believes the impossible.

hardship, toil, fatigue, stress, and failure mark our present. Yet this is not our eternal condition, only a temporal pilgrimage. We have rest because we hope for that which is still future. Tomorrow is another day. We do not know what the next second, minute, hour, day, week, month, year, or decade will bring. We do know, however, what lies for us beyond this vapor called life.

Paul told the Colossian believers that there is laid up for them something beyond the immediate and temporal. This object awaiting them calls them to hope.

What lies ahead of us?

- The glory of God (Rom. 5:2)
- The forgiveness of sin (Col. 1:5, 27)
- The resurrection from the dead (1 Thess. 4:13)
- The second coming of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13)

Is this not enough? There is coming a day when we will see Jesus face-to-face (1 John 3:1, 2). This hope purifies his people. Because God is the God of hope, we can be filled with all joy and peace in believing. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can abound in hope (Rom. 15:13).

Paul speaks to the Colossian community at large and then personifies this faith, love, and hope in a person, Epaphras. Paul's commendation of Epaphras is a consequence of the gospel. In its absence, there is no faith, no love, and no hope. Fellow servants who carry out the will of their heavenly Father mark the *Story* of God. Epaphras exemplifies Christ to his people.

Perhaps today you find yourself in despair. Let us follow the admonition of the apostle in chapter 3 verse 2, "To set our minds on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." It is this eternal perspective that will give us hope and, thus, rest in the present. Perhaps today you will be the hands and feet of Christ to someone who struggles. Be open to the Spirit's movement in your midst. He is present. So let us not forget to remember that everything will get better . . . **that is the promise.**

3

Praying for the Knowledge of His Will

“For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col. 1:9).

Read Colossians 1:9-12

In verses 3 through 8, Paul provides the motivation for praying. Here in verses 9 through 12, he gives the content of his prayer. Paul’s request or petition centers on mind renewal, “You may be filled with the knowledge of his will.” A knowledge of his will is gained through spiritual wisdom and understanding.

It is interesting to see the connection between mind renewal (“knowledge of his will”) and life transformation (“You will walk in a worthy manner”). The two are inseparably linked. Mind renewal results in life transformation. You cannot put the one before the other nor can you have one without the other. It is analogous to the thought presented in James 2:14-26, “Faith without works is dead.” Mind renewal must come first and life transformation will follow.

Knowledge alone puffs up (1 Cor. 8:1, “Knowledge makes arrogant”). Yet action without information is blind (2 Tim. 3:5, “Holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power”). The two must be undividable.

As we continue to grow in our knowledge of grace, we learn how our present life flows forth in obedient acts. Fruit is born.

Nevertheless, let us not think the “fruit” can replace mind renewal.

As my knowledge of who Jesus is, what he has done, and who I am in him increases, my performance (i.e., daily walk) aligns more readily with my position. I simply choose to obey and trust him to work out what he has promised. I no longer have to struggle against my failure, but rest in his obedience. His obedience is my obedience. Obedience displays Christ and it is a wonderful thing to be involved in.

I no longer have to struggle against my failure, but rest in His obedience.

Paul provides four descriptive present participles in verses 10 through 12.

- Bearing fruit in every good work (v.10)
- Increasing in the knowledge of God (v.10)
- Being strengthened with all power (v.11)
- Giving thanks to the Father (v.12, 4:2)

As the Holy Spirit works in us through the application of his Word, the manifestation of the worthy walk that is pleasing to him is seen through fruit bearing, increased knowledge, perseverance, and gratitude. The list provided by Paul is descriptive of those whose lives flow from the living waters. Such a listing is not exhaustive, but suggestive of the kind of fruit the Holy Spirit works in and through his people. Such demonstrations do not make us worthy. *The walk before us does not attain, but accepts.* A worthy walk does not gain his approval; it flows from his approval.

A worthy walk does not gain His approval; it flows from His approval.

To the best of my knowledge and strength, I have willed to seek Christ. Nevertheless, in all of my “willing” I continue to come short of perfection. I desire him, but even here, I am lacking. Like a sheep, my “bleating” reminds me of my inability, inadequacy, and shortcomings (1 Sam. 15:14). My imperfection does not make me stop obeying, but rather causes me to rest in the knowledge that he is working both to will and to do according to his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12, 13).

Every day I am reminded that I cannot, but Jesus can. *Jesus can.* As God continues to increase my knowledge of his will through the systematic study of his Word, he shows me my inadequacy and his complete sufficiency. I lean on him alone to bear fruit, increase my knowledge, keep me steadfast, and return thanks for qualifying me to share in the inheritance of the saints. This is the story God tells through his people. He works his life in and through his people. This is what he looks like in “jars of clay” (2 Cor. 4:7).

In my choosing to believe Jesus is enough, he does for me in the choosing what I would never do for myself. It is in this choice I rest.

This, then, is my prayer — that you would be filled with the knowledge of his will and from this overflow would grow a cluster of fruit that calls forth his glory and greatness.

May you rest knowing he is working his perfect will in you and through you to those around you for his glory and your good.

4

Qualified to Share in the Inheritance

“Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light” (Col. 1:12).

Read Colossians 1:12-20

The word “qualified” in our text means, “To be worthy, to be able.” Most of us understand the word in the context of qualifying for the Olympic Games. One must meet an established standard. Those that do not qualify are excluded from participation in the Games.

Colossians 1:12 used the word in this way. The Father has qualified us to share in the inheritance. Without this divine qualification, we would be excluded. It is because of the Father’s work through his Son’s death that his people are qualified for heaven. I am worthy to enter only because of his Son.

“Nothing in my hands I bring,
simply to the cross I cling.”

Notice with me verses 13 and following. Because of God’s work in my behalf, I now receive the inheritance. The following verses define for us this inheritance.

It is because of the Father’s work through his Son’s death that his people are qualified for heaven.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son (v. 13). The inheritance is not something we get in the future. Upon his death, we received our inheritance. Wow, this is already true!

The word “domain” is the same one translated “authority” in Matthew 28:18. It is the same word used by Pontius Pilate when he said to our Lord, “I have power.” Jesus said in return, “The only power you have is the power you have received from God” (John 19:10, 11). It is the same word found in Colossians 1:16, 2:10, and 15. Our Lord’s authority, domain and power are an inclusive and pervasive power. We are no longer under the power or authority of darkness. We have been placed into the kingdom of his beloved Son (**and let me remind you that his kingdom is where grace reigns**).

Because of where we now are, who he is, and the nature of his sacrifice, we have redemption (v. 14), the forgiveness of sins (v. 14), reconciliation (vv. 20, 22), and the privilege to one day be presented before the Father holy and blameless and above reproach (v. 22). This is all true because the Father has qualified me to share in the inheritance!

The Father qualifies us to share in the inheritance because of the work of another. Something happened that made it possible for one who was unqualified to become qualified. This something is *someone* and his name is Jesus. From Genesis through Revelation, the Bible promises and pictures a deliverer. The Gospels tell us of his arrival and his work. Paul expands on the nature of his person and his work. What follows in verses 15-19 is a graphic picture of just who Jesus is . . .

- The image of the invisible God (v. 15a)
- The firstborn of all creation (v. 15b)
- The creator of all things, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through and for him (v. 16)
- Before all things (v. 17a)
- The sustainer of all things (v. 17b)

- The head of the body, the church (v. 18a)
- The beginning (v. 18b)
- The firstborn from the dead (v. 18c)

It is this Jesus who towers over all things created. Because Jesus is all this and more, he will have the preeminence (v. 18). All of the above explains verse 19 and why verse 20 is possible. This is what the fullness of God looks like (v. 19). This is why through him he can reconcile to himself all things (v. 20). Is he not stately in his person and striking in his work?

The idea of “firstborn” in verses 15 and 18 speaks of position and status, not origin. The “firstborn” speaks of privilege, power, and portion. To argue for the Son having a starting point is a “gross” mishandling of the biblical revelation.

The listing of who he is, is so that we might see just how qualified we are. IN HIM, we have every right to receive the inheritance. In fact, this is why Romans 8:17 identifies us as fellow-heirs with him because of his work in our behalf.

Today let us celebrate Jesus and in celebrating him, let us be giving thanks to him who has qualified us to share in the inheritance. Oh may our inner spirits groan with delight. May we be captured in our every thought and movement. May his person and work compel us to worship and constrain us to adoration and attentiveness.

5

And Although You Were Formerly Alienated

*“And although you were formerly alienated
and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds” (Col. 1:21).*

Read Colossians 1:21-23

“And we were formerly” . . . “formerly.” With this word is finality. **It is what once was, but no longer is.** We were formerly alienated. We were, but are no longer. We once were alienated, removed, separated, estranged, quarrelling, and disagreeing, but now . . . now, we are reconciled, united, at peace, in harmony, near, and have a full and free access. Oh, praise his name! Because of this, reconciliation is brought through him who is the image of the invisible God. We have done nothing to merit it nor could ever do anything to maintain it. It was freely given and freely sustained.

This reconciliation has brought about our standing before the Father, a standing that is holy and blameless and above reproach.

We trip over the statement in verse 23, “If indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope . . .” In English the “if” speaks of a condition. It suggests that something may or may not happen. The consequence is contingent on an action. If you continue, then _____. You fill in the blank.

We have come to believe that being holy, blameless, and above reproach is dependent on the “if” of verse 23. Yet, we must think of the larger context in which we find our “if”

The cross was in order that we might be presented before him, holy and blameless and above reproach.

statement. Notice with me how in verse 22 we revisit the idea of reconciliation. Why the cross? The cross was in order that we might be presented before him, holy and blameless and above reproach.

This is what the cross did and does . . . not what we do. Reconciliation results in our holiness, blamelessness, and the ability to be above reproach. Nothing else can do what he did.

If the “if” of verse 23 is dependent on us, then not only is our holiness, blamelessness, and above reproach status in jeopardy, but the undoing of our reconciliation is at stake. It is not our ability that is called into question, but his ability and the sufficiency of his cross work. Can Jesus keep what he reconciles? Who controls what? Is it God or man? Oh how powerful the questioning and how decisive the conclusion.

We all struggle in our performance at times, but that is not what determines “if we are continuing in the faith.” Denying the faith (i.e. apostasy) is what reveals an unbelieving heart.

Remember, you were formerly alienated, but now in him “you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace” (Eph. 2:13, 14).

Because Jesus Christ forms the basis for our access we can “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16). Let us do so today and every day! Let us stop believing the devil’s lies and let us come before him with the full confidence that he is attentive to us and that nothing separates us from him.

6

Christ In You, The Hope of Glory

*“To whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**”
(Col. 1:27).*

Read Colossians 1:24-2:5.

The Bible calls this truth a mystery. A biblical mystery is something that was previously unknown but is now being made known (1:26). What is the truth that once existed as a mystery? The disclosing of the mystery is this: “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (v. 26).

Christ in you . . . such astonishing words. Think of the mindset that existed within his audience. There sat the Jew hearing that Christ, the Messiah, the promised one, the reigning king, the conquering lion, is in you. Nevertheless, it is not just for the Jew, but also the Gentile (v. 27).

Paul’s mission was “to make the word of God fully known” (v. 25). This was his toil and struggle (v. 29). In so doing, “He would fill up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body” (v.24). In the learning of this mystery, the body is presented as “mature in Christ” (v. 28).

Paul’s struggle (2:1) was for his audience “to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ” (2:2).

What Paul calls “the Mystery,” we call identification truth, positional truth, the Christ Life, the exchanged life, etc. All of these descriptions encapsulated in verse 26, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” For many within the body of Christ this truth is still a mystery. Paul’s language is intentional. Notice how he communicates this mystery in verse 29.

“For this purpose also **I labor, striving according to his power, which mightily works within me**” (Col. 1:29).

Paul’s descriptions of himself and the setting forth of various commands is never absent from “striving according to his power, which mightily works within me.” This is the same thought John brings out in John 15:5.

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, **for apart from Me you can do nothing**” (John 15:5).

Again it is seen in 1 Corinthians 15:10, Ephesians 3:20, and Philippians 2:12, 13 (See also Gal. 2:20 and Col. 3:1-4).

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me did not prove vain; **but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me**” (1 Cor. 15:10).

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, **according to the power that works within us,**” (Eph. 3:20).

“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure**” (Phil. 2:12-13).

What we struggle with is how this looks in everyday life. As such, we deny this singular truth, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” We have made the commands of the New Testament very much man-centered. We no longer are able to say, “I toil,” because we live in a religious culture that is often void of positional truth. **Paul did not preach balance.** He did not think, “I work and God works.” He said, “**I work only because God works. My work is his work.**” He said, “Without him, I can do nothing.” **This is not the message of balance, but of abandonment.** Let us grab hold of this truth and find the “I” of my identity answered in who I am in Christ. Whomever and whatever I might be is shadowed by all that he is in me and for me. Why do we struggle with this thought? Why is the death of self so painful? Why do we struggle so violently against this? Oh God, may we embrace the theology of the cross unashamedly!

Paul said,
“Without Him,
I can do nothing.”
This is not the
message of
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abandonment.

In the *Story* of God, he did not send his only begotten Son to enable his people to co-labor with him. His redemptive activity and atoning work are not an enablement, but a rescue.

The work of God manifested itself through Paul’s struggle and it was the struggle for the people of God to lay hold of and live in light of this singular truth, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Why is this so crucial? Because in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3). In him, we have all we need and by God’s internal working, he will one day be all we want.

7

In Him You Have Been Made Complete

*“And in him you have been made complete,
and he is the head over all rule and authority” (Col. 2:10).*

Read Colossians 2:6-15.

The book of Colossians is all about Jesus Christ. In our present paragraph of study, there is an enormous emphasis on him. In fact, the phrase, “in him” occurs seven times in Colossians and all but two are found in this paragraph (1:17, 19; 2:6, 7, 9, 10, 11).

- Col. 2:6 Walk **in him**
- Col. 2:7 Having been firmly rooted and now being built up **in him**
- Col. 2:9 For **in him** all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form
- Col.2:10 And **in him** you have been made complete
- Col.2:11 And **in him** you were also circumcised

Our location “in him” causes the author to speak of our union “with him” (2:12, 13) thus permitting us to “triumph over them through him” (2:15).

It is always about “him.”

- Verse 6 begins by reminding us that just as we have received him by grace alone through faith alone, let us continue in the same. Our walk in him is by grace alone through faith alone.

- Verse 7 is a statement of fact; it describes what is true.
- Verse 8 exhorts the reader to be captivated by Christ and not the shadows.
- Verse 9 tells us why. In Christ, all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form. Here we have a tremendous statement concerning the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ through the Virgin Mary.
- Verse 10 establishes the completeness of our existence by sourcing it in his fullness.

His reign is a full reign. There is no deficiency in what he does or in how he does it. There is no question of ethics or morality as it relates to God.

Jesus is “worthy” (1:10), “pleasing in all respects” (1:10), “holy and blameless and beyond reproach” (1:22). He is above every rule and authority because he created them (1:16, 2:10). His triumph over all things created is an established absolute (2:15). Our identification in him already provides for us his victory (2:13).

<p>We are not working from a position of deficiency, but from abundance. All that we need we already have.</p>
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Colossians 2:10 assures us that we are not working from a position of deficiency, but from abundance. All that we need we already have. His triumph, his victory, his conquest over the world, the flesh, and the devil is so complete as to lack nothing (2:13-15). Oh how wonderfully warm this truth is for those who shiver under the cold harsh hand of reality.

The word “complete” (**plarow**) as used in 2:10 is found in 1:9, 25, 4:12, and 17. Coming from the same root is the word “fullness” (**plaroma**) as found in 1:19 and 2:9. It is this same “fullness” dwelling in Jesus that now makes complete our

lack. There is fullness to the Christian life that overflows in ministry that expresses itself in worship. This is the idea of John 7:37-39 (See also John 4:14).

³⁷“Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, **‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’**”

³⁹ But this he spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-39).

Verses 11 through 15 depict this fullness for his people. Because of Calvary, our condition is complete, nothing more can be added to it or subtracted from it. No matter what the assault against it, the believer in Christ stands complete.

This is why Paul lays forth the great claims of Scripture. This is why what was once a mystery should no longer exist as such. This is why we must be compelled to say along with the apostle, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

As we struggle over all things temporal, let this singular truth stabilize our struggle, “In him you have been made complete.” May this give us cause to celebrate and declare, “He is all we have and all we need.” May this continue to be the centerpiece of our fellowship, family, body, and ministry. May we continue to say, “He is enough in this life and in the life to come.”

8

True Spirituality

“Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day” (Col. 2:16).

Read Colossians 2:16-23

The text before us builds on the previous statements found in 2:10-15. Since 2:10-15 is true, then 2:16-23 is true. Let no one pass judgment on you concerning “food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day.”

This paragraph is one of the clearest, most powerful passages concerning “True Spirituality.” It is to our shame, that often we judge people based on their performance. We become consumed, distracted, and attached to shadows. By doing so, we choose to function in a role that is not our own. We can be neither judge nor jury. Yet, it pleases us to point out where people “succeed” and “fail.” Somehow, in the process of “pointing,” we place ourselves in a position of superiority. How tragic!

What right do we have to judge someone based on whether or not he or she conforms to our preconceived standard of behavior? Most of what we consider righteous behavior is nothing more than cultural directives and “tribal” traditions.

Thus, we govern ourselves by “do not handle, do not taste, and do not touch” (v. 21). In case we miss Paul’s point in Colossians 2:16-23, cultural directives and “tribal” traditions are of no value against fleshly indulgence (v. 23). Paul is not applauding our self-appointed role of policing the

performance of others. In fact, just the opposite is true. Paul is troubled at what he is hearing. The sin of legalism or Pharisaical fragmentation is just as damning as lasciviousness or sexual promiscuity. The one might be wearing its “suit and tie” while the other is perhaps, more scantily clad, but let us not deceive ourselves. Both are immoral and ungodly. There is no right in either.

Think about what we deem inappropriate: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these (Gal. 5:19-21). Do we place strife in the same category as drunkenness? What about immorality as being in cahoots with factions and envying? We must speak where Scripture speaks . . . and only where Scripture speaks. It is foolish for us to assume we know the mind of God when in fact we do not. Our brazen usurping of authority places us in a position similar to that of Lucifer in Isaiah 14:12-15.

We must stay focused
on the simplicity of
grace alone,
through faith alone,
in Christ alone (v. 18).
Everything apart
from him
is of no consequence.

I believe the text is dealing primarily with the Mosaic code. Paul calls it “a shadow of what is to come” (v. 17). The real deal belongs to Christ (v. 17). In God’s *Story*, he provided promises and pictures. Their intent was “to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24). We must not allow people to add to or subtract from Christ. We must stay focused on the simplicity of grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (v. 18). Everything apart from him is of no consequence. Growth is in and by God alone. No one but God can cause growth (v. 19). Growth will not happen by the activities listed in verses 16, 18, and 21. All these activities are “destined to perish with use” (v. 22).

Since we have died with Christ (2:21-15, 20), we are not to submit to worldly regulations. Nothing we do can change us spiritually (vv. 21, 22). We might think someone is spiritual by the way they live, but lifestyle will not make anyone more or less spiritual (v. 23). There is an “appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body,” but it is only a façade.

Behavior flows from spirituality, not for spirituality. You are spiritual. Your behavior reflects this. **It is a result, not a cause.** I long for the day when we understand Paul’s point. If I am dead to the world and alive in Christ, do my “righteous” acts make me any more or less dead or alive? Of course not. As a believer, you are as dead and as alive as you will ever be. The issue is whether you believe what God says is true. Will you rest in his finished work?

Will you rest in his finished work?

Let us be a fellowship where grace reigns. Grace is not selling out holiness or minimizing sin. Such talk is ludicrous. In our desire for rightness, let it be in our pursuit of Christ, not in the presumptuous false deception of self-righteousness. May the “rain” of grace cleanse us from Pharisaical attitudes that defile his body.

9

Your Life is Hidden With Christ in God

“For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:1).

Read Colossians 3:1-11

This is perhaps one of the most startling, liberating, and “take your breath away” passages in the entire New Testament. Colossians 3:1-4 expands on 1:27, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” It is equally an ongoing piece that began in 2:12-15. For Paul, **who we are in Christ and what he is for us is the essence of the Christian life.**

The truths contained in this short paragraph are truly staggering. Consider the bottom line.

Who we are in Christ and what he is for us is the essence of the Christian life.

- You have been raised with Christ (v.1)
- You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God (v.3)
- Christ is your life (v.4)

This is the believer’s reality. Nothing we do can undo what he has done. Right now, regardless as to how I might feel or have performed, I am with Christ in the heavenlies. Right now, who I was in Adam has died and the life I now live is hidden with Christ in God (Gal. 2:20). In fact, Christ is my life!

This is, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Inside of our present paragraph are two “therefore” statements (vv.1, 5).

The first “therefore” in verse 1 ties the thought back to 2:12-15. The second “therefore” in verse 5 flows from the preceding paragraph in 3:1-4.

Each is based on our position in Christ. The exhortations throughout the paragraph flow from this heavenly position.

Because my life is hidden with Christ in God:

- I should keep seeking the things above (v.1).
- I should set my mind on the things above (v.2).
- I should consider the members of my earthly body as dead to sin (v.5).
- I should put it aside (v.8).

What is interesting in the passage is the synergism between the two thoughts.

- I am seated in the heavenlies with Christ, so I should keep seeking the things above (v.1)
- I am dead to the things of this world, so I should not set my mind on the things that are on the earth (2:20, 3:2)
- I am dead, so I should consider myself dead (v.5).
- I have put aside the old self, so I should put them all aside (vv.8, 9).

The one reflects the other. The one flows from the other. The one affects and changes the other. The flow is only one way. My position changes my performance. My performance cannot change my position.

My position
changes my performance.
My performance cannot
change my position.

In all of this, what is the bottom line? We see it in verse 11, “Christ is all, and in all.” Everything we experience is but a shadow of him. Everything is by him, through him, and for him (1:16). “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (1:17). Nothing we know falls outside of this thought. Even our life and the complexity of it all is only a shadow of a larger reality.

The life we live in our flesh is hidden with Christ in God. Jesus Christ is our life. I cannot explain it. It is a mystery in many ways, but I can believe it. I will believe the Scripture even when life crashes all around me. I will believe God even when despair washes over me.

Today, may you have the strength to believe that what God has said is true. May we not waffle in our commitment to this reality. May we continue to dance in the reign of grace.

10

Beyond All These Things Put On Love

*“Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity”
(Col. 3:14).*

Read Colossians 3:12-17

Have you ever just wanted to be loved . . . a love that expresses itself in acceptance and forgiveness that is honest and transparent? When looking at verses 12 and 13 the listing of certain fruit is interesting: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, and forgiving each other. It is by no means an exhaustive listing, but the listing clusters around relational truth. It is what marks our interaction with other people.

When the apostle said, “Beyond all these things put on love,” he was not saying anything in contrast to the preceding list, but in conclusion to the list. The list forms pieces of which love is the whole. This same idea is expressed in 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 and 13.

“But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13).

Why is love so crucial? Perhaps the answer is found in 1 Peter 4:8.

“Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8).

This same idea is found in Proverbs.

“Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions”
(Prov. 10:12).

Jesus said it would be our love one for another that would set us apart from non-believers in John 13:34, 35.

³⁴ “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34, 35).

I always find it interesting how we often define Christianity by what we do not do, the prohibitions, and the negatives instead of what we are to do. We are radically different from the unbeliever because we love one another.

Jesus said it would be our love one for another that would set us apart from non-believers.

Is this what is characterizing the people of God? Remember, our love is not only for those within our fellowship, but is equally to be present to those in other fellowships.

We, of all people, should have nothing negative to say about another person in the body of Christ. If something must be said, then we should say it to their face. Otherwise we should keep our thoughts to ourselves.

I am so grateful for all churches who are preaching Christ and him crucified. For us to have any other attitude toward other members in the body of Christ is foolish and counterproductive.

We are a family and other churches are the family of God. We are a body and other churches are the body of Christ. How tragic when we allow our pettiness to hurt the body of Christ.

Paul notes how by putting on love, there will be “the perfect bond of unity” (v.14b). His admonition in verse 15 is a call toward body unity. We have made this narrow by making it individual, but it is a call for us as a fellowship to be of one mind.

A ruling peace manifests itself in gratitude (v.15). An indwelling Word manifests itself in teaching, admonishing, singing, and thanksgiving (v.16). What is Paul’s bottom line? “Whatever you do in word or deed,” give God the glory and praise (v.17).

May it please the Father to work in us and through us his love to those around us. Friends, “Beyond all these things, let us put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.” Praise the Lord.

11

It is the Lord Christ Whom You Serve

"It is the Lord Christ whom you serve" (Col. 3:24).

Read Colossians 3:18-4:1

Chapters 3 and 4 show the consequence or result of positional truth. Almost without exception, the listing of Christ-like characteristics in chapters 3 and 4 are relational in nature. The truth of grace operates in the arena of relationships. This is nowhere more seen than in the family unit.

Within the paragraph, there are a series of commands.

- Wives submit to your husbands (3:18)
- Husbands love your wives (3:19)
- Do not be embittered against them (3:19)
- Children obey your parents (3:20)
- Fathers do not exasperate your children (3:21)
- Slaves obey your masters on earth (3:22)
- Masters grant justice and fairness to your slaves (4:1)

What must not be forgotten in looking at this paragraph of commands is that it is all working from what is true. The foundational truth stretches all the way back to 2:10 and following. You are dead to yourself and the world and you are alive in Christ. The listing of the commands is what the resurrected life looks like. Paul never separates our performance from our position. If we look at the above-mentioned commands in the absence of what has already been taught, it will lead to bondage and failure.

My choice (as a husband) to love, expressing itself in acts of love, is the outworking of Christ's life in me and through me to my wife. I choose to love and act accordingly because he is willing me to choose and act.

The listing of the commands is what the resurrected life looks like. Paul never separates our performance from our position.

This thinking makes my choosing a "delightful duty." It excites me to know that God is working in me and through me in the context of the family unit. I know I am not able to love my wife as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25), but I know of One who can and will and his name is Jesus.

Often in the family relationship, we stop with what we see. All we see is a wife or husband, or a child, yet the passage pushes us beyond the immediate and temporal and calls us to someone higher.

- wives submit to your husbands (3:18)
 - *As is fitting in the Lord*
- husbands love your wives (3:19)
- do not be embittered against them (3:19)
- children obey your parents (3:20)
 - *For this is well-pleasing to the Lord*
- fathers do not exasperate your children (3:21)
- slaves obey your masters on earth (3:22)
 - *With sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord*
 - *Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men*
 - *It is the Lord Christ whom you serve*
- Masters grant justice and fairness to your slaves (4:1)
 - *You too have a master in heaven*

Our service to the Lord is through people and those people are often the ones closest to us. When I understand how my life is swallowed up in the Lord, then when I serve my wife, children, employer, and peers, I am actually serving the him.

Because we have separated and compartmentalized life, we fail to see him in all things. Yet, he is present.

Colossians 3:24-25 remind me of what is mine in Christ and the inherent demerit of sin.

What a joy it is to know that Christ is completing his work in us and through us to those around us. It is with joy that I as a husband love my wife and as a father seek to encourage my children. My joy is found in knowing that as I serve you I am serving the Lord. Herein is the secret to contentment.

Because we have
separated and compartmentalized life,
we fail to see him in all things.
Yet, he is present.

12

The Mystery of Christ

*“Praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth **the mystery of Christ**, for which I have also been imprisoned” (Col. 4:3).*

Read Colossians 4:2-18

Paul ends with a series of commands, as he does in most of his letters. I find this intriguing only because we often find ourselves gazing so intently at the tree that we lose sight of the forest. Our propensity is to focus on the individual commands in the absence of the larger context of the paragraph and book. The focus of the commands is on, “The Mystery of Christ.”

Our prayers (vv. 2, 3), conduct (v. 5), and speech (v. 6) all revolve around making manifest, “The Mystery of Christ.” If such is the case, and this would appear to be so, then we must not forget what, “The Mystery of Christ” is.

The word “mystery” is used four times in Colossians (1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3). All four occurrences appear to converge on the same truth. He explains what the mystery is in 1:27, “To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

The mystery is, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Paul plays this out in 2:10 and following. Paul’s quest is that his audience might know what this entails.

As New Testament believers, we are to understand what this encompasses. For too long we have lived shallow lives of ignorance that keep us in bondage to a performance-based approach of acceptance before God. Christianity has never been and never will be a man-centered enterprise. This whole thing is about Jesus Christ, his work on our behalf, and our relationship to him through this work.

As much as the artist paints the picture, or shapes the clay pot, or sculpts the rock, or the musician plays the instrument, so also are we, his people, the workmanship of his hands (Eph. 2:10).

Christianity has never been and never will be a man-centered enterprise. This whole thing is about Jesus Christ, his work on our behalf, and our relationship to him through this work.

Our prayers are for the revealing of, "The Mystery of Christ." Our conduct is that in us and through us, "The Mystery of Christ" would be revealed. Our speech is for declaring, "The Mystery of Christ." Our purpose is to discover all that he is for us through the cross and all that we are because of it.

Why God would send his Son to become what he created is beyond my ability to comprehend. The depth of this goes even further when I contemplate the cross. My astonishment and joy only increases when I meditate on such truths as justification, propitiation, reconciliation, redemption, adoption, and imputation.

Now, at this very moment, I stand complete in Christ (2:10). All my transgression is forgiven (2:13). I am seated with him at the Father's right hand (3:1). My life is hidden with Christ in God (3:3), and Christ is my life (3:4). Friend, herein is found, "The Mystery of Christ."

Can you fathom his working in your behalf? Are you even capable of assimilating the full import of these truths? Have you even begun to scratch the surface of the mystery? What Paul is telling us is not secondary or ancillary, but primary and dominant. This is the New Testament revelation. It is the thread that holds together the garment. It is the cornerstone upon which the entire building is constructed. It is what drives the New Testament engine. It is what gives life to the dead. Those who have seen its glory, have handled its riches, have heard its serene voice, and have tasted of its delicacies, cannot go back to the empty husks of a man-centered, legalistic religion. This truth transforms. It is what sets free the people of God. Anything less than complete abandonment in the sufficiency and satisfaction of Jesus Christ is to denigrate the cross.

Today, let us glory in his cross. Let us readily acknowledge our inability before him and then boast of his complete sufficiency. Let us say before all that, "Jesus Christ is enough in this life and in the life that is to come," and then let us share this message with every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. Friend, let us praise the Lord together.

Anything less than complete abandonment in the sufficiency and satisfaction of Jesus Christ is to denigrate the cross.
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A Final Word

Wow . . . Colossians is quite the journey. I trust you took your time to stop, smell, taste, and see. There is a tendency to press ahead, to stop at nothing, and not to waste time, but the pursuit of Christ cannot be measured by distance covered or time passed. The hunt is not measured so easily. He is not an item on our “to do” list that is to be checked off. To reduce Christ and the journey toward him in such a manner is to make mundane the marvelous and base the most beautiful.

Paul’s intent, as is the intent of all biblical revelation, is to show Christ. Did you see him? In fact, did you taste and smell him? Our journey to and with Jesus is a sensory experience. It is not simply to inform our minds, but to delight our senses.

He is like fine food and a refreshing drink. He is the arresting aromatic smell that reminds us of our favorites. It is my desire that in all things I might see him. Not just in the spectacular or the incomprehensible, but in the simple and common. Although we are to see the invisible and comprehend the incomprehensible, let us not be fooled. Although he is all we need, he is always giving us more than we need. His gifting is unbridled. Go back and reread Colossians. If you read it fast, then slow down. If you did not understand, then meditate on the tough parts. Ask God . . . no, beg God to show you himself through the text of Scripture. Beg him to make large his picture in all things created. Trust me. If you ask, he will give it to you. If you seek him, you will find him. If you knock at his door, you will find it flung open wide.

May you find that Jesus Christ is in you and he is your “Hope of Glory.”

Waukesha Bible Church



(262) 541-7177
waukeshabible.org