

COLOSSIANS BIBLE STUDY

Colossians 1:24-29

Lesson #9

Mystery - Christ in Us, our Hope of Glory

In the preceding verses, 15-20, we've heard Paul present a picture of Jesus Christ in all His preeminent glory, and then in verses 21-23 a picture of mankind in our natural condition of alienation from God due to our inherent hostility of mind towards His commandments. But, by the sovereign grace of God, He provided His Son as a substitute payee for our debt, and a substitute source for the mandatory righteousness that we don't have. In this lesson we're going to see some things regarding the application of these principles and the mystery that surrounds them.

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. 25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 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. 28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. Col 1:24-29 (NASB)

Verse 24:

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

What does Paul mean? Is he saying that Jesus didn't do everything that He needed to do, so now Paul has to finish the work that Jesus overlooked? Of course not. But, Christ has left us to fulfill a stewardship on His behalf, and as Paul says, fulfilling it often involves our suffering on behalf of carrying that out. The degree of that suffering is up to Him, but the call of total subservience is binding to all who wish to be His disciples. (Mat 16:24-26; Luk 9:22-26)

What's lacking in Christ's afflictions is simply the continuance of the gospel presentation regarding the work that He's already fully done, and the sanctifying effects that it's intended to produce among His elect, until the fullness of the Gentiles chosen by God has finally come to repentance and faith, through the preaching of the gospel, and the work of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 11:25; 2Pet 3:9)

25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;

Romans 11:25 (NASB)

9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB)

As these two verses so clearly reveal, though I admit I didn't always understand them properly, is that there is a predetermined number of elect from the gentiles whom God has chosen from before creation to redeem, and He will not return until every last one of them has come to repentance and faith. As Jesus said, He would not lose even one of those whom the Father has given Him. (Jn 6:39) This is the only possible interpretation that can be made that is both true to the intent of the words, and preserves God's absolute sovereignty over all matters of creation. Any other interpretation either makes the words meaningless, or strips God of His absolute sovereignty over all matters.

Verse 25:

25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God,

Just as God the Father chose to accomplish the work of all creation through the agency of His Son, in like manner, He's chosen to finish the work of saving and maturing His predestined elect through the agency of His own redeemed men, and the power of His Holy Spirit. It appears that God has determined to both allow and encourage participation in His various endeavors. While the power and direction is entirely His, nevertheless He's determined to make us the tangible instruments through which He performs all His works.

This carries with it both great value and great danger. The value is that we're afforded meaningful purpose for our lives, and get to share in the joy and excitement of all God's marvelous workings. The danger is that we might easily come to think that we're the one's that are making everything happen, and start to improvise and modify the operations, based on our own opinions and feelings. This is a very real danger, and must be avoided at all cost, because God doesn't share His glory with anyone, and demands a proper understanding of both His place and our place in the implementation of His operations. His redeemed must always remember that everything that we're doing is by His grace and entirely for His glory. We, in our flesh and blood bodies, are continuing the work that's been afforded us to do in the implementation of the plan of God. But the plan, the power, the results, and the glory, are all God's.

We must never come to think that we can improve on it, or we have to modify it from time to time to adjust to various changes in culture or philosophy. The understanding that this gospel was intended by God for a predetermined and minuscule remnant of humanity, (Mat 7:13-14) and will be 100 percent effectual for that remnant by His sovereign effectual drawing (Rom 8:29-30) is lesson #1 for any and all who seek to evangelize the lost. A would be evangelist who doesn't understand this thoroughly is nothing more than a peddler of false hopes through clever and practiced salesmanship techniques. It is the preaching of the word, with nothing added and nothing left out, that God has commissioned His evangelists to proclaim, until the last person in the book of life has come to repentance and faith. (2Pet 3:9)

Verse 26:

26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,

Exactly what mystery is Paul referring to? (Eph 2:11-3:12)

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands—12 remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.17 And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near;18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Eph 2:11-22 (NASB)

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you;3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was

given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,⁹ and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;¹⁰ so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.¹¹ This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,¹² in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

Eph 3:1-12 (NASB)

This is the eternal and cosmic mystery to which Paul is referring. That God has from the beginning intended to extend the scope of His eternal promises made to the children of Abraham to the gentile nations as well, through the instrumentality of His Son, and the gift of faith through the working of the Holy Spirit. The mystery of Jesus Christ is that He has been set apart by God the Father to be the propitiation for both Jew and Gentile, regardless of nationality, race, gender, or economic status. God has chosen His elect from among all the basest of peoples and least impressive of humanity, specifically to preclude the idea that it's based on the merits of man, but solely on the sovereign grace of God.

Paul isn't telling the Colossians that he's giving them something that the other churches don't know. He's telling them that the whole mystery is the gospel. The New Testament gospel is the mystery that was hidden from ages past but has now been made known through Jesus Christ to the elect who have ears to hear. Remember what Paul told the Corinthians?

18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside."²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom, did not come to know God, God was well-pleased, through the foolishness of the message preached, to save those who believe.²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom;²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God.²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.²⁶ For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,²⁹ [Why?] so that no man may boast before God.³⁰ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,³¹ so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

1 Cor 1:18-31 (NASB)

Just for some clarification, let's acknowledge that the scriptures certainly do tell us that the promises made by God to Abraham were said to eventually extend to the gentiles, so in that sense it shouldn't be a true mystery, thought this was widely overlooked by the Jews. What was indeed a true mystery was just how He would do this. How would God justify the lost pagan nations that didn't know God or even want to know Him? They were lost and didn't even know it. They were condemned and thought themselves to be innocent. How would God accomplish this impossible task of redemption of that which was lost and ruined and totally indifferent to God? The New Testament gospel is the mysterious answer to that seemingly impossible question. It's the unfolding of God's predetermined plan that He had devised before He ever began creation itself. And He kept it hidden from the eyes of man, and the eyes of angelic powers, even though there were numerous clues in the Old Testament scriptures.

From the ages past, God had a plan by which He would redeem, and sanctify, and eventually even glorify His predestined elect, and His Son Jesus is that plan. This incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Jesus is the mystery of God that had been hidden until the time appointed for His appearance. But now, this mystery has been revealed to His saints through the Apostles and prophets, and the working of the Holy Spirit; and yet it still remains a foolish mystery to those who don't believe. And this itself is also part of God's mystery, how so many people can see with their own eyes, and hear with their own ears, and yet not believe it. Unbelief is irrational and irresponsible in light of the preponderance of evidence in the holy scriptures. And yet, it's nonetheless the condition of the vast majority of humanity. This too is part of God's mysterious predetermined plan. But that which was a hidden mystery, has now been fully preached, fully proclaimed to His elect and to the whole world in the holy scriptures.

To sum this up, Jesus Christ, including who He is, what He's already done, and what He will do in the eternal creation plan, is the mystery of God that had been hidden for ages, but has now been fully revealed to those whom He has chosen to believe and understand.

Verse 27:

27 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

This verse begins with the declaration that "to whom God willed." This makes it clear just who will and who won't believe and understand this mystery. Those whom God wills, (desires and chooses) will believe, those whom He doesn't will think it's foolish nonsense. Not because some are wiser, or some are nicer, or some are more deserving, but simply because God willed that some would believe and some would not. This is probably the most misunderstood and despised teaching that the bible presents. But it is what the bible presents. God has made a plan that totally precludes any possibility of boasting or pride on man's part. So, it was God's will to make this mystery known, and to choose who would and who wouldn't believe it.

The verse goes on to say that we are to "know what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the gentiles." It's one thing to know a mystery, but another to know just how that mystery applies to us personally. This verse is telling us that we have not only been allowed to comprehend the mystery, but we are fully part of it. And it goes on to tell us how that happens. "Which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

We humans have difficulty comprehending non corporal forces and influences, let alone non corporal living beings. But our whole relationship with God is on a non corporal basis. "No man has seen God at any time" is the statement of scriptures. (Jn 1:18) But we, meaning humanity, have seen Jesus Christ. And this Jesus told us that the Father was "in Him, and He was in the Father." This is the non corporal residing within the corporal entity. This is the invisible God being manifested in human flesh. (Jn 1:14; Col 1:15)

We find this amazing, that the almighty God could, and would, manifest Himself within a flesh and blood body. But, since it's Jesus, we're not too surprised. After all, He was perfect and holy from the beginning. But here's the real mystery, that **we** are said to "in Christ", and He is said to be "in us." And right here is the riches of the glory of this mystery - "Christ in us." It's difficult to fully comprehend, and we don't even know the specifics of how it happened, but one thing we do know, it's true. Not just because God says so, but because we're consciously aware of His inward presence, and the influence that He has on our very makeup. Our thoughts, our affections, our values, our desires, and our outward actions and words are all visibly and drastically changed from within. And we know it wasn't our own doing that made it happen. Something literally came into us, and now indwells our very minds and hearts. This is "Christ in you," and it's the sole and only means to glory for fallen mankind. To be "in Christ" and to have "Christ in us" are simply two different perspectives of the very same thing. When Christ is in us, we are in Christ. When the Holy Spirit takes residence in the spirit of man, there is a union that merges the two in one new creature:

2Co 5:17 - *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*

Eph 4:24 - *and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God, has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*

Col 3:10 - *and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him*

Every man and every woman has but one hope of eternal glory, and that is to be found "in Christ," which is also to say that Christ is evident and effectual in them, working His sanctification and transformation of that individual into the image of Jesus Christ, so that Christ will be the first among many like-minded brothers. (Rom 8:29-30) It's these, and these alone, who will find that narrow and difficult gate that leads to eternal life, and get to share in the eternal glory that's been predestined before creation for Jesus and His eternal bride, who are the worshipping family of God the Father.

Verses 28-29:

28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Now, because of this mystery revealed to all mankind, therefore we proclaim Him, that is Jesus, who is Himself the very essence of the mystery. The mystery, and the good news, is - Jesus Christ; the beloved Son of God, and the one and only hope of all mankind. So, we proclaim Him, as we've been commissioned to do until His return. We do this for the purpose of presenting to Him a mate that is "complete in Christ."

Complete how? Does this men we might not be completely in Christ, but just a little in Christ? No, that 's not the point. The point is that the work of sanctification and transformation is intended to be progressive and ongoing in the lives of the elect, and this process is implemented by the continuous proclamation of all the riches of Christ, and His intention for His elect. Which is, that we are to grow up in spiritual maturity and righteousness of life. In revelation 19, where Jesus returns to earth to take control of His kingdom, it says that the bride has made herself ready. Surely this lifelong sanctification and transformation is what's being referred to as making herself ready. Make no mistake, we can't and don't achieve this totally of ourselves, as it states in Philippians 1:6, He who began this good work is the One who will perfect it when He returns, but everywhere we are exhorted to pursue this as our life's goal, so that we will be able to appreciate the fulfillment in His good time.

In the meantime, we continue the pursuit, striving according to the power of God that's working within us, through this regenerated spirit and transformed mind, eagerly awaiting the fulfillment of this great mystery.

Conclusion:

From the time before God spoke the heavens and earth into existence, He had formulated a plan whereby He would create and fashion for Himself a special family. This family would be His children, and would be specially processed and prepared to know Him in a close and personal way. They would be made uniquely capable of comprehending the distinction between that which is good and that which is evil, and by that comprehension they would be able to understand the infinite value of the perfect righteousness and holiness of God Himself. With this end product in view, God made the universe and everything that's in it. He fashioned man in His own image and set him on a journey that would ultimately prepare him to be an eternal child of God. This process demanded that this man learn what are the differences and the results of this knowledge of good and evil.

God would only accept the righteous as His children and worshipers. And righteousness can only be appreciated and understood by those who have seen and experienced first hand the deadly and destructive effects of sin. So, God intentionally and providentially set a course for His elect children that would lead them through the very midst of this deadly and destructive force. He determined that they would have to meet it head on, and see for themselves that they can't defeat it or overcome it on their own power. Every true child of God learns that the force of evil is more powerful than the will power of man, and apart from a special Savior, who is stronger than us, it will claim us all. This is mandatory knowledge for any to enter the kingdom of God. And it's for the purpose of clearly learning this, that man is commanded by God to live up to a set of commands that he can't possible meet. For those who don't understand the purpose, it seems cruel and vindictive for God to demand that which He knows that we can't do, and many refuse to accept it because they can't understand. But for those who are His chosen, the blessed hope of His return, with the gift of a new bodily container that's not defiled by sin, nor even desirous of it, is the greatest gift we can ever imagine.

The chosen learn this lesson well, the others never get it, and accuse God of dishonesty or cruelty, or just never quite figure out what's actually going on. But God withheld the knowledge of this plan as a mystery for many ages, until He was ready to reveal His instrument of salvation to His chosen. Through His Son, Jesus Christ, He has provided an atonement for those who were predestined to experience sin for themselves, so they would come to understand its destructive power over them.

Because of His great and eternal love for His children, God also provided for the atonement for those sins committed by His elect, and the substitutionary righteousness that He requires for their entrance into His kingdom, where they will then be separated from their defiled earthly bodies and re-clothed with a new body of absolute righteousness. His children will not only be removed from the presence of sin, and all its destruction, but much more, they will be removed from the desire and temptation of sin, with which they had struggled and lost all of their earthly lives.

God told Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, including the Gentiles, and the whole of time and every event that takes place in it, has been providently determined, and set in place by God, to accomplish this specific work of preparation of His children for their chosen destiny. All the events of the age serve to show mankind, through endless examples, the glory of God and His absolute sovereignty over all things. Through His Son, God implements His eternal plan for a kingdom of worshipping children. This is the mystery of the gospel that's been committed to the saints and mightily works within them.

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