

**JESUS CHRIST PREEMINENT:
Colossal Grace Today for the Discouraged
Heart**

Meditations on the Major Message of Colossians

By

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: CONCENTRATING ON LIGHT HIMSELF

Much of our stagnation and frustration in the Christian life can be traced back to one root problem: we don't pay close enough attention to Jesus Christ Himself. Colossians is a power packed epistle that addresses the root of discouragement in our lives falling short of God's glory in our day to day existence. I came across an article years ago that I feel summarizes the dilemma facing the Colossian church and perhaps in an even greater intensity in our day.

No one figured he'd amount to much. He was scrawny, the kind of kid other kids make sport of mocking. He was a decidedly unhurried learner. School bored him. A terrible test taker, he was eight before he could read. Unexpectedly, he ended up finding a seat at history's table. He made history by making one incredible decision. Augustin Jean Fresnel's life is more than just a great story, a curious paradox, a tale with unexpected twists and turns. Augustin's decision has immense significance for every lover of God.

Sailors' lives in Augustin's day were routinely endangered. Lighthouses could not project light out to sea far enough to warn oncoming ships. Ship captains often didn't see the light until it was too late to change course. Skeletons of rotting ships littered the beaches of the world. The problem was not for lack of well placed lighthouses, but for lack of light being reflected far enough out to sea to penetrate the darkness.

For two thousand years people explored ways to correct the problem, finding little success. Starting with the lighthouse of Alexandria built around 280 BC, until the 18th century, lighthouses saw very little improvement in their ability to project light. It wasn't because people weren't trying. Most concentrated on developing better fuel. People thought if they could just make the flame brighter, it would solve the problem. Wood, coal, whale lamps, nothing proved effectual. The breakthrough came two thousand years later, when Augustin Jean Fresnel decided to take a different course. Instead of trying to improve existing lighthouse technology, or producing better fuel, Fresnel would study the behavior of light itself.

Fresnel didn't study lighthouses. He did not focus on design, maximum configuration, and placement. He wouldn't exhume the ribs of fractured ships and do a doctoral thesis on flawed ship construction. He never designed a manual on lighthouse maintenance and staffing. Instead, (and this is the crucial point of this book), he spent his life studying light itself...and for thousands of ships and sailors, that made all the difference.

Fresnel using the properties of reflected light, built an apparatus that could be seen from more than 20 miles away. His studies in light became the principle used in headlights of cars and in the flashing lights on police and emergency vehicles. By studying the behavior of light itself, Fresnel developed a lens that could reflect light far out to sea. Fresnel grew up to become the father of modern optics. His story illustrates a compelling reality for the people of God. It is more meaningful to study the character of Light Himself, than to concentrate on any other thing related to Him.

We face the same problem faced in Fresnel's day. We have light, glorious light, but it isn't reflected far enough out to sea. Lives, marriages, and institutions daily land shipwrecked and sundered, bleached and rotting on our shores. Every day our culture is battered on the razor sharp edges of post-modernism and relativism. Yet we persist in tending the light, hoping to warn a few ships to turn toward deeper waters.

...The Light is not, or will ever be, insufficient to penetrate the darkness. Jesus is completely and utterly sufficient. But He has chosen to be magnified through the lens of our lives. We are reflecting Him poorly, because we are not focused on Him. We need more Augustin's who will concentrate themselves solely on knowing light. Our greatest need is simplicity of devotion to Jesus. We're aware that countless ships are colliding in the night. We know the statistics. We've seen the skeletons on our beaches. The children of Light must be concentrated on Light Himself. We are concentrating on many things related to Him, but we are not focused primarily on Him. The main thing is no longer the main thing. Or perhaps I should say, the main One is no longer the main One.¹

My hope is in this study of Colossians to avoid the shipwrecks of lives, marriages, and institutions by shining the Light, the Lord Jesus Christ, farther out to sea. "The children of Light must be concentrated on Light Himself." I wholeheartedly agree. But more than my weightless opinion is the weightiness of the Apostle Paul who wrote this letter devoted to Christ. And as we catch hold of God's message in the connection with the real problem these real believers were facing, we will find Jesus completely and utterly sufficient for every area of our lives.

Science has demonstrated that plant growth is stunted when it receives only one spectrum of white light. White light is really a combination of all the colors of the rainbow. Plants that grow up under a subset of white light, such as only red light, blue light, or green light, do grow. They grow, but *much more slowly* than those which receive all the colors of white light or sunlight. By God's grace I hope to show the "white light" of the Good News of God's grace for each and every Christian in Christ that maximizes spiritual growth. Colossians gets our focus upon the Light, the Lord Jesus.

Our guide, Paul, has itinerated our alpine tour through the book of Colossians to mount up from wonder to jaw-dropping wonder of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He leads us onward to the breathless implications of the historical facts of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Majesty. Paul yearns to instruct the saints into a fuller understanding of what God has done, is doing, and will do for us in Christ. It is to our great loss that the treasure-filled palaces of Christ in the Word of God be overlooked by too cursory a glance. We *see* them but have not *observed*. A. W. Tozer once witnessed among Christians,

May not the inadequacy of much of our spiritual experience be traced back to our habit of skipping through the corridors of the kingdom like little children through the market place, chattering about everything but pausing to learn the true value of nothing?²

Colossians is a kingdom corridor showcasing the alpine glories of the Lord Jesus Christ in His preeminence in the entire created universe. We want to pause long enough in this entryway to allow our minds to soak in the true value of Christ and by faith to enjoy our inheritance in Him. This brings

¹Fawn Parish, "It's All About You Jesus" (<http://www.reignbridge.com/?page=iaayj> retrieved on December 28, 2007)

²A. W. Tozer, "Tozer Devotional: Give Time to God" (<http://www.cmalliance.org/devotions/tozer?id=178> retrieved on April 5, 2011)

God glory! A colossal wide-eyed vista of Christ is what holds out hope for the downcast Christian. Christians too often live in the filthy squalor of the flesh when in fact they are the rightful heirs of the incalculable riches of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit eclipses the artistry of a Michelangelo through the steady, skillful pen of the Apostle Paul. Paul's God-breathed words are the "paint" with which the Spirit yearns to apply the brushstrokes of sublime and superb portraits of Jesus Christ upon the canvas of our faith. Truly, Jesus Christ, the hope of glory, is the cure for even the weakest saint's malady for a holy life. Paul ransacks all of creation to find the supreme metaphors concerning the Lord Jesus Christ to assure us that we have been firmly planted into a kingdom that can never be shaken. Through the pen of Paul and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we enter into the wonderland of an all-sufficient Christ for everything we need in the Christian life. But this is no fairy tale which vanishes once our feet exit the amusement park. This is the wonderland of faith, for which we will ever be growing in amazement of our Lord Jesus through all eternity!

Why Study Colossians?

About four to five years ago, the Lord impressed very deeply on me to study the whole book of Colossians as a unit and not disconnected pieces. For a number of years prior, I benefitted much from the gigantic vistas of the Lord Jesus in Colossians 1. Chapter 2 especially had been a frequent "watering hole" to quench my soul's thirst for the riches of grace of who I am in Jesus. I loved the beautiful outworkings of the Christian life in chapters 3 and 4. But I did not understand the book of Colossians as a whole. I was not aware that God had a simple theme upon which all the complex ideas cluster around. The one unifying theme from beginning to end reveals the Lord Jesus Christ in a unique way that no other book in the Bible does. My exploration by faith into investigating the whole began a mighty transformation in my life. I began to see Colossians as one of God's full explanations in the Bible of how Christians are to live the Christian life. The clarity of the theme has so focused my heart upon the Person and work of Jesus Christ that has safeguarded me from many of the false substitutes in our day that sound so good and look so right.

This is by no means an exhaustive study. Had this been a verse by verse exposition of this fathomless epistle, I can only imagine it would be ten times the length of this book! Rather it is an exposition aimed at the discovery of what particular unveiling of the Lord Jesus Christ is in the book of Colossians is as a whole and how that revelation of Him is intended to radically transform our spiritual walk. This is simply a flyover of these pages to give you the spirit of the book. Once you understand the big picture, all the little pieces and parts all come together. My prayer is that the reader may be enabled to seek the Holy Spirit's help in drawing out the many precious truths from the rest of Colossians.

It is my hope in communicating some of these discoveries of my journey in the book of Colossians to show the incredible riches mined out of its divine intent. By God's grace I hope that by so seeing the heart of God in why this letter was written, the principles behind it, and the intended inciting to faith in Jesus Christ, that the reader will glorify the Lord by entering into an increasing knowledge of God that experiences continual transformation into the image of the Son of God.

As You Have Received Christ, So Walk in Him

Colossians is neatly divided into two halves. The first two chapters expound upon the doctrinal or theological facts of the Savior and His redemptive activities. It is a concentrated Gospel presentation of what God has done for each believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. The last two chapters are devoted to the practical outworkings of faith in having received such an awesome Savior. Together they serve as a Spirit sanctioned X-ray for checking up on the health and soundness of faith towards Christ. I believe the key verse that helps grasping God's intent for the whole letter is Colossians 2:6:

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.

This simplified summary has served me as a general rule of thumb. There are overlaps of the big theme of each chapter into the others, but each chapter does have a predominating theme that the others do not highlight in quite the same way. Chapter 1 is primarily about Christ. Along with John 1 and Hebrews 1, this chapter has been noted by many as one of the most Christological in the Bible. We can take our key verse and highlight the Lord Jesus here: "as you have received CHRIST, so walk in him". This chapter is soaked with the exalted portraits of the preeminent Lord Jesus Christ as Creator, Redeemer, Reconciler, Head of the Church and other glories.

Chapter 2 is about our reception or appropriation of Christ: "as you have RECEIVED Christ, so walk in him." It speaks about receiving Christ. Through Jesus we have already received the fullness of the Godhead bodily, circumcision, resurrection, forgiveness among other blessings. It also speaks towards what receiving Christ is not. We received Christ, the body of substance, not shadows of Old Testament preparatory pictures, supposed visions of angels, or commandments of men.

Chapters 3 and 4 emphasize the practical life of faith: "as you have received Christ, SO WALK IN HIM." Chapter 3 depicts the outworkings of Christ received. So Paul heads the list with victory over the sins of the flesh, followed by the putting on Christ in godly character. The rest of chapter 3 shows what human relationships look like when we've received Christ: husbands and wives, fathers and children, masters and slaves. Chapter 4 underscores the same outworkings of receiving Christ, this time illustrating it using actual people in the church.

If we've truly embraced Christ by faith, these last two chapters give us a sample, not an exhaustive list. By being principle minded, the examples serve us to see the underlying principle so that we can apply them to every area of our Christian life. Colossians blessedly announces the "how" of experiencing every other list in the Bible—the fruit of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, the character lists in the pastoral epistles, the life of Christ shown us in four Gospels.

Colossians 3:1-4 are key verses that show how believing the Gospel transitions to living the Gospel. These are the pivotal "AS...SO" of "as you have received Christ, so walk in him." This is the real burden of my heart in writing. Failure to grasp how to turn the corner from faith in Christ to experiencing the truth according to godliness results in many unhappy and frustrating experiences—legalism, barrenness, joylessness, discouragement, hopelessness, and corruptness of thought, word and deed. This Spirit-

inspired, Christ-saturated transition is intended to lift us to the heights of faith for which every earnest child of God yearns for—to see Christ glorified in our body, whether by life or by death. God has so designed this epistle to breath fresh life into our sanctification—our actual conformity to Christ in thought, word and deed. A right understanding of the purpose of God here sets aright the rudder of our course for the sanctified life.

The Greatest Book for Holy Living

As I alluded to, I have spent more time meditating over Colossians over the last five years than any other book in the Bible. With good reason, for I have been more transformed into the image of Christ here than any other book. Colossians, I believe, is the fullest explanation of all the books in the Bible of how to live a life well pleasing to the Lord. It is perhaps the greatest book on record what promotes holy living. As God is a holy God, His holiness permeates every one of the 66 books which comprise our Bible. Colossians is unique in the sense that it centers upon the how of holiness. Yes, God wants me to be holy, but *how* do I do that? In Colossians God answers that big how for us. Though Colossians is filled with complex thoughts about Jesus Christ, these are all clustered around a single, simple theme. The simple message of Colossians is for every Christian to possess Christ here and now, not just in future glory when we go to heaven.

A Burden for God's Whole Counsel

I have a particular burden in putting the fruits of my studies and devotions for this exposition. It saddens my heart how often the key verses in transitioning from the theological to the practical don't get their full impact. An incomplete understanding of these verses takes the wind out of the sails for the intended hope the Gospel is to bring. In having studied or listened to many reputable evangelical commentators over the years, I am surprised how often the interpretation of these transitional passages divorces itself from the continuity of thought in the epistle. I respect and have greatly benefitted from the truth that expositors have mined from it, but in light of the wonderful theme of Colossians I fear many do not draw forth the whole counsel of God on it. I refer to Colossians 3:4:

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

What comes to your mind when you read that verse? Is it the glorious appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ at His Second Coming? No doubt this is in view as Paul writes. However, I am burdened that we don't miss the fantastic wonder of what the Spirit of God is communicating here by these few brief words. A majority of Christ-loving commentators, whom I deeply respect, interpret this verse *exclusively* to Jesus Christ's Second Coming. What a glorious truth that when Christ is revealed we will also be revealed with Him in glory! But is this what the Spirit had in mind when including it within the context of this letter to Colossian saints? Is the reference here limited to a single climactic event consummating our sanctification, or does it hold out the promise of a continuous experience throughout our sanctification? Is the revelation of Christ more like the spectacular eruption of a volcano or more like the flowing river that continually pours out into the sea? I will endeavor to show by the big themes of Colossians and the continuity of thought from beginning to end of the letter that the Spirit had more in

mind than Christ's appearance at His Second Coming. There is a guiding principle for daily life in Christ crystallized in the imagery of Christ's Second Coming.

I am burdened that in the study of Colossians that a Grand Canyon truth of God can be unwittingly glossed over. What is at stake is an unintentional downplaying of our present experiencing of Christ's power over sin and the Spirit's power to produce God-glorifying fruit. If we understand verse 4 as exclusively referring to Christ's Second Advent in the future, that shifts the interpretation of this verse upon our motivation. Because Christ is coming again and we will appear with Him in glory, the thought goes, it reorients our heart in hopeful ways. If this is purely a motivational passage, it subtly relegates the *power* of Christ's grace out of faith's grasp *until* Christ comes in glory in the clouds. We end up swapping the present power of Christ preeminent in our daily lives that this verse intends for a "pep talk" that produces desire but not ability. We know from numerous other passages that God grants the power for living the Christian life, but an exclusive view to the Second Coming here obscures that. Without our faith in Christ being awakened to lay hold upon the present principle and foretaste, we lose much of the impact that this epistle was intended to make for our daily transformation into the image of God. It is not desires alone that the Gospel is intended to transform. Thank God that He works in us the willingness to do as He does! The hope of glory Paul labors in four chapters for his readers to understand is the *present power* abundantly supplied by Christ being revealed through the Gospel. The future hope of coming glory at Christ's Second Advent is to be united with the present hope of Christ's present glory by beholding the Gospel of the glory of Christ.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor 3:18)

A Transforming Vision of God Transforms

It is my hope by expositing these verses to draw upon observations and illumination of the Spirit to put the one-two knockout punch to sin in the life of every believer. May God open up our understanding how to apply the Gospel declarations of the first half of the book towards godly practice in daily life!

A great temptation is to think of God as a doting grandfather just sporadically handing out grace to His grandkids. Or we perhaps we think of God after the manner of a soup kitchen volunteer ladling out just enough grace in the bowl to get the down-and-outers through the day. Our head tells us that God is fabulously wealthy beyond imagination but our experience says He just gives us periodic sprinkles of Christ, eking out only enough to ride out the storms of life. Sin still seems a raging tyrant to us. It is a far cry from the daily showers of the Lord that fulfill His Gospel promise to bless us and make us a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen 12:1-3). It is an experience that knows not the Lord's promise of *rivers*—not trickles nor even river (singular)—of living waters flowing out (John 7:37-39).

It is my hope that a careful observation of these passages in their context will transform your vision of God as an abundant giver of Jesus Christ for every situation, for every relationship, for every ministry, at all times and all places. The good news is that at the bottom of all these riches is the Lord Jesus Christ whose blood has reconciled us to God. A right understanding of the heart of God will motivate you to

pray, like Paul, for yourself and others to be filled with the knowledge of His will, namely, God delights and rejoices to clothe us daily with Christ. We are familiar with the prodigal's father whose joy could not withhold the best robe. Our Father in heaven is as joyful or more to clothe us in His best Robe—His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the One who loves us and gave Himself for us!

CHAPTER 2

COLOSSAL THEME #1: CHRIST PREEMINENT

Colossal themes anchored in the Person and work of Christ are designed to bolster our hope in the Gospel as our one-stop-shop for holiness in the cruddy here and now. One cannot go far into the letter without failing to observe the preeminence of Christ. Now Paul did not sit down to exalt Jesus Christ in such a grandiose way because he knew that somewhere down the road that would provide great material for the Christology chapter in theology books. Paul was writing to real people with real problems; the preeminence of Christ is God's wise solution to resolving them.

We need to take a little time to compare prominence with preeminence because many think they are the same thing but they're not. We need to take the higher ground that Scripture ascribes to preeminence so that we can enter into the heart of God. Preeminence is vastly different than prominence, but often the distinction between the two gets blurred. Paul, in writing this letter, is not advocating for Jesus to be prominent—first in the list of many. In American history, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln stand out prominently among the many U.S. Presidents. We have a day dedicated to them in February called President's Day. The feats accomplished by these premier men at critical junctures at our nation's history have catapulted them in the national consciousness to a conspicuous place of honor and dignity. Jesus Christ is the King of kings (and presidents). He is preeminent over all the U.S. Presidents, for He that created these great men—Washington and Lincoln—is greater than they, just as the architect excels the house he built (Heb 3:3). The Lord raises up kings and brings them down. The heart of the king is in His hand to turn it whichever way He desires. The Lord is preeminent amidst the presidents of the United States, for not only is He king over them but over every great world ruler from the ancient times of the Pharaohs and Caesars until the present time. Jesus Christ is not prominent among many like George Washington but preeminent—above all.

Here's another example to aid our thoughts about the weight Scripture gives to preeminence. We might have Jesus first on our list of life priorities along with family, church and work. No, preeminence means that Jesus is above all our lists. This is not just playing with words; it signifies a totally different direction of the heart and life. It is the difference between a life existing, just surviving, and possessing the abundant life of Christ.

If you have been saved for any length of time, you are probably familiar with Jesus being the "Lord of all in your life". I heard a sermon recently in which the speaker got tongue-tied and said, "The Lord of life in your all". I like that! That sums up the preeminence of Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of life in my all. In whatever we do, Jesus is not the first priority (prominence); He is the Lord of life in everything we do (preeminence). As a husband, He is the Lord of that life. As a father, He is the Lord of that life too. As a Christian, He is the Lord of life in all its fruit of the Spirit, fruit of righteousness, and fruit of soul winning.

In my Christian service, He is the Lord of life in all I do for Him. Let your heart marinate in this precious Gospel truth: Jesus Christ is the Lord of life in your all!

We are tempted to compartmentalize our lives. We have “church life” blocked off on our calendar here, over “family life” sectioned off there, “work life” from 8 to 5 Monday to Friday, and whatever other little boxes we use to define our existence. Men are especially prone to categorizing life into neat little boxes that rarely spill over into each other. In this way of thinking, Jesus can be very prominent in my life. I have a “quiet time” in the morning where I put Jesus first. Then I go about my day, whatever is on the agenda, not giving hardly a thought to my heavenly identity in the Lord Jesus. Perhaps I have other little boxes in my day I devote to Jesus—singing in my car, reading the Bible during my lunch break, memorizing a Scripture verse after dinner, praying before bedtime. I may think of Jesus as first place in my list of priorities, yet that does not mean I’m relating to Him as preeminent. To have Jesus punctuating my day once or many times is to have Jesus prominent, but not preeminent. If Jesus is first, then something is second. When Jesus is preeminent, there is no second or third or fourth; Christ is all and in all. Jesus being prominent—first in a list of everything—is not what God is after in the book of Colossians.

I ran across an excellent quote by a British Presbyterian writer in the nineteenth century named Joseph Parker, who encapsulated the heart and soul of the preeminence of Jesus Christ:

Jesus Christ was *not a figure on a landscape*: he was and is the life of all living things. . . . in the case of Jesus Christ I want nothing but Christ: I want the landscape to fade away into an invisible fleck, and nothing to be seen but the CHRIST, filling all things and making all things look small under his infinite presence.³

So what exactly does it mean for Jesus to be *preeminent* in my life? If you are scratching your head about what this means, you are not alone. I have often wrestled with the trying to understand the difference. I hope by walking through the Spirit-guided tour of Colossians we will gain a clearer understanding to lay hold of Jesus as our preeminent Substitute for life.

Christ Preeminent: Firstborn of All Creation

We are considering the first mega theme of preeminence. In chapter 1 Paul has pulled the divine scrapbook off the shelf and is showing us these amazing snapshots of what God has already done for us in Christ. With the whole universe in his panoramic lens, Paul draws our attention to how Jesus Christ is preeminent in creation and then in the new creation, the Church. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15). “Firstborn” here does not mean, as some have tried to argue, that Jesus Christ was first in a line of created beings. Firstborn has nothing to do with time of origin but rather rank of importance. The Messiah in the Psalms is said to have been the firstborn among the kings. “And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth” (Ps 89:27). The plain understanding of firstborn is of rank. It is akin to saying that Jesus is “King of kings and Lord of lords”.

³ Joseph Parker, *These Sayings of Mine*, (New York: I. K. Funk & Co., Publishers, 1881), pg 2

Hebrews perhaps sheds light on this idea of the firstborn through the idea of exalted honor:

For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) (Heb 3:3-4, ESV)

Rembrandt is more honored than his paintings. Frank Lloyd Wright is more honored than his buildings. Michelangelo is more honored than his sculptures. How much more honor does God get who is the creator of Rembrandt, Wright and Michelangelo! Jesus Christ, who Paul depicts in Colossians 1 as “the builder of all things”, deserves the preeminent place, worthy of the highest recognition and glory! By virtue of His being Creator of all necessitates more glory as the “firstborn of all creation”.

What Paul is saying in essence is this: “Saints, look to Jesus how exalted He is in creation! He created everything that exists and He created you. All things are held together by Him in this material universe, whether great or small, whether visible or invisible. How much more will He hold together your spiritual life?”

Christ Preeminent: Firstborn from the Dead

Let’s now look to the crux of Christ’s preeminence in the church and how that informs our understanding of our appearing with Christ in glory, the key transitional verses of chapter 3:

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. (Col 1:18)

We see “firstborn” again repeated, this time in a slightly different context. Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. Again, the reference to firstborn does not signify time of origin. There have been some resurrections prior to Jesus’. Jesus Himself raised Jairus’ daughter, the widow’s son from Nain, and Lazarus before He ever arose from the tomb. Hundreds of years before Immanuel, the Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha had been instrumental in raising the dead. No, the death of Jesus Christ and His subsequent resurrection is first in rank of importance, because every other righteous saint from the beginning of time to the consummation of all things is absolutely, utterly dependent upon it! Romans 6 heralds the glorious revelation of the preeminence of Christ’s death and resurrection in the lives of believers.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:3-4)

The death of Jesus stands in a unique position in all of creation. This is because Jesus, as these verses in Romans proclaim, is our substitute. Because He died for our sins, we need not. Jesus suffered the full penalty of God’s wrath that our sins rightfully deserved; He graciously paid the debt we could never repay by His broken body and shed blood. The glorious truth of substitution is applied in Romans 6 to Christ’s death and burial. Every Christian has been baptized, that is, fully immersed or enveloped in, Christ Jesus. Our inclusion into Christ means an inclusion into every aspect of His finished work. So

when Jesus Christ died to sin, because we've been included in Him, we are dead to sin. Sin no longer has power over us because it no longer has power over Christ! Because Christ was buried, we were buried in Him. The good news of this connection is that when Christ was raised from the tomb, we were too! I cannot fly; planes can fly. When I am in the airplane, I fly. I cannot die to sin nor walk in the newness of life. Christ, though, did die to sin and does walk in the newness of life. He is dead to sin and alive to God. When I am in Christ, I am dead to sin and alive to God, walking in the newness of life. This is the glorious news of the Gospel, where we receive the benefits of the finished work of Christ by faith. Jesus as the firstborn from the dead illustrates what all the people of God who are united to Him can expect. Christ is dead to sin; so we are dead to sin because we are in union with Him. All the benefits and privileges bestowed upon Christ our firstborn are showered upon all His brothers with whom the inheritance is bequeathed.

The Golden Chain of Christ's Preeminence in Everything

Now let's return to our treatment regarding Christ as firstborn. "He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent." Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. Christ has the highest rank of the resurrection; His is the resurrection of all resurrections. The little word "that" is the crucial link in the golden chain of Christ's preeminence in everything. Let's not miss what it is that makes Jesus Christ preeminent in the new creation: "He is . . . the firstborn from the dead, *that* in everything he might be preeminent." "That" is the Greek *hina*, a very common conjunction that denotes purpose or result (i.e. in order that). Kenneth Wuest has a New Testament translation that helpfully employs as many English words as needed to convey the original sense of the Greek text. I find Wuest's translation of this verse especially enlightening. He translates,

"...in order that [*hina*] He might become in all things Himself the one who is preeminent."

Jesus Christ is the firstborn from the dead, the first in rank of all the resurrected dead. Why? It was necessary for Him to become in all things the One who is preeminent. The "all things" refers in context to the church. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the golden link that joins His preeminence with everything in the church. For Jesus to be continuously preeminent was dependent upon Him being the firstborn from the dead. In the original creation, the Lord is preeminent in that He holds all things together. He feeds all living creatures and provides for their every need—light, air, food, water, warmth. In the new creation, because Christ died and rose again, He feeds all its blood-bought citizens. It is not in the basic elements of this earthly sphere, which were weak, shadow-like, and preparatory, but the substance and reality of eternal things. Our food is now a heart faith that feeds upon and is strengthened by Christ's broken body on Calvary. Our drink is now a trusting in Christ's blood that blotted out all of our sins, everything that could possibly separate us from our holy Lord God Almighty. Our water is the Holy Spirit of God, welling up within us as a spring of life, flowing out as rivers. Our light is Christ, the true Light that enlightens every man. Jesus' death and resurrection was essential for God's eternal goal of making Jesus preeminent in all things pertaining to the church. Since this is God's goal, are we coming more into conformity with His purpose?

Christ's Preeminence Secures the Inheritance for All

Paul's thoughts of Christ's preeminence in chapter 1 carry over to our transition verses in chapter 3. Observe the continuity of this overarching theme in these verses in chapter 3:

Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but *Christ is all, and in all*. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...

Paul is saying that human distinctions like race or religion are meaningless when it comes to enjoying Christ and incarnating (reflecting) Him to others. Christ is all, and in all. Christ is everything (Christlike) and in everybody (of Christ). Yes, God does meet out different measures of faith in His variety of gifts operating in His body (Rom 12:3-6). But all His children have equal access to Christ in commonly shared character traits, particularly as it is all summed up the greatest commandment: love.

Earlier in the epistle, Paul had noted the universal availability of the Gospel in all the world. As this same message was preached to peoples of all races, nations, peoples, and tongues, the net result was the same.

Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth (Col 1:5-6)

So what is summarized as “bearing fruit” in chapter 1 is itemized as “compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” in chapter 3. Paul is essentially pointing out to the Colossian brothers that the love and fruit-bearing they had already experienced by receiving Christ Jesus the Lord was of the same quality as that experienced by many other different peoples in all the world. The hope of the Gospel is that just as it was in the past with them—and just as was happening all over the world—so expect the same Gospel to produce the same fruitfulness right now. “The same Gospel that gets you into the kingdom advances the kingdom in you.”⁴

The new creation trumps over every manmade distinction the world tries to erect. The real advantage of the believer is having Christ Himself, the Prince of Life, not having an existence sculpted by man's culture or religious upbringing. No manmade distinction has any advantage over any saint that shares in the life of the Lord. Had Paul wrote this in our day, he might have said, “There is neither Baptist nor Pentecostal, Fundamentalist nor Charismatic, Calvinist nor Arminian; but Christ is all, and in all.” Radical? Yes, but Christ Himself—and nothing or no one else—is supposed to define us. Nothing manmade should ever usurp the exalted place Jesus should have in the identity of God's people. “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph 2:14). Too often dividing walls of hostility exist because we still live in a fallen world. Too

⁴ Tullian Tchividjian, “Jesus + Nothing = Everything (Part 13)” (audio quotation transcribed from <http://www.crpc.org/sermons--media/sermon/jesus---nothing---everything--part-13-> on April 4, 2011)

often it is because God's people forget who they are in Christ because of indwelling sin. That is the lie Paul is trying to dismantle by renewing their minds in the Gospel. But the good news is that as we seek "the things above", our identity will be more tightly bound up with Jesus Christ and less tethered to the elitist distinctions from man like culture, language, religious background, doctrinal position, or denomination. In heaven all of God's people will wave the same palm branch, dress in the same blood-washed white robe, and sing the same song, "Salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb!" May we as Jesus' body continue to become what we already are in Christ as shown to be in heaven!

Because each believer has a rich inheritance given him—Christ—he is able by God's grace to experience the kingdom benefits—love, joy, peace, etc. Paul is summing up an argument here, by saying that Christ is all, and in all. Jesus is God's everything; Christ is all. Jesus is equally available to all God's elect; no one is excluded because they were born a Jew or born a Greek, or were born out of the worst of mankind, like a barbarian or Scythian. Every saint has equal privilege; the preeminence of Christ secures equal access to the riches of the inheritance of the saints in the Light.

The Preeminent Christ is Our Life

Because Christ is all and in all, Paul goes on to make a conclusion from this stupendous fact. "Put on then," he reasons, "compassionate hearts, kindness, humility..." The Greek word for "then" is *oun*, a word often used in logic and argument for "therefore". The parade of Christian virtues has a definite and distinct connection to what precedes it. The only reason any Christian can have a compassionate heart is because Christ is all (*He* is compassion) and in all (i.e. all of God's people regardless of religious, cultural or biological origin). Every Christian has the complete inheritance in Christ by grace and no other earthly reason like the false teachers in Colosse tried to insinuate. The only reason that kindness flourishes in any believer is because they are in union with the preeminent Christ who is kindness. Kindness is an expression of life. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Jesus Himself is the life, and the life expresses itself chiefly as love. Every other virtue—joy, peace, gentleness—is a derivative of love. This is the hidden life in God being made manifest.

Paul says this same truth to the Corinthian believers:

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1Cor 1:30-31, ESV)

Sanctification (holiness in conduct) is simply the progressive conformity of the believer in practice what he already is in position. His position of being forgiven of every sin and credited the perfect righteousness is by God's legal decree. Faith in Jesus Christ, God's only approved sacrifice for sins, secures the believers' not-guilty standing before God. In justification God sees us already perfect in Jesus Christ; in sanctification the world sees us being perfected by degrees like Jesus Christ. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Little did these unenlightened Jewish leaders realize was that this boldness *was* the Lord Jesus! So Christ Jesus was made unto us sanctification, our character that showcases the eternal life of the new creation. This is a

marvelous truth! What it is saying is that God the Father has made our Lord Jesus Christ our sanctification, just as He was made our righteousness.

In the context of Colossians, every time the Father reveals Christ, He is revealing Him in such a way that He becomes our sanctification. Christ becomes our love; Christ becomes our kindness; Christ becomes our humility. Therefore, as Paul writes, how can *we* boast? We do not manufacture righteousness or construct our own holiness. Our boast of these marks of grace is a boast in the Lord, because it *is* the Lord. That's exactly what Paul is saying to us in Colossians by stating that when Christ our life appears, you will appear with Him in glory. The invisible Lord is revealed through our visible presence on the earth. "...Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:14).

CHAPTER 3

THE COLOSSIAN PROBLEM: DISCOURAGEMENT

Jesus Christ is huge, enormous, gigantic, titanic—immeasurably surpassing every need of the entire universe! Paul’s opening curtain unveils the preeminence of Jesus Christ. It is an unveiling designed to produce hope. Hope in Jesus Christ answers to the real problem facing these Colossian believers—and by extension to every believer in every age. Much has been said by the commentators about the false teachings in Colosse. They were a problem, but not the main problem. The real issue was misplaced hope. Instead of grounding their hopes securely in the Good News of the Lord Jesus Christ for the A-to-Z of a God-pleasing life, these faithful brothers were being seduced by these philosophies and “Christian” techniques that sounded so good and so right. We need not have the exact recipe that made up the errant teachings beleaguering the Colossians. Paul simply gave us a sampling of representative ingredients. The Judaizers had their hand in the pie, advocating Old Testament ceremonial laws like Sabbaths and festivals. The Gnostics were cooking up unbiblical notions that spiritual things are good and material things are evil. Other Greek philosophies of the day also contributed to the proverbial “too many chefs spoiling the broth”. The focus of Paul’s letter is not an exhaustive treatise on false teachings. Everything we need to understand the main point is all contained within the epistle itself. It doesn’t matter all that much if we can define the precise contents of the false teachings. What is essential, though, is that we grasp the *principle* animating them. Professor Paul desires that we graduate from the elementary teachings to our doctorate in Christ Jesus in order to lead us from problem to solution.

Christians today may think that they are not duped like the Colossians because they don’t practice the list of chapter 2. “I don’t get into all the Jewish dietary laws. I can eat pork and shrimp. I am not in bondage to keeping the Sabbath and the Feast of Tabernacles.” Yet because of a failure to understand the underlying principles, that same Christian can be in far greater danger than the Colossians ever were! Instead of hearing what the Spirit is saying in principle, this becomes a checklist of external righteousness. That totally misses the point. If we are ever to be presented mature and complete in Christ, it is indispensable that we are properly warned (Col 1:28). If a trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? We need to hear the clarion call of the apostle so that we can be warned of the enemies infiltrating the churches in our day. We need to be *principle-minded* in order to bridge the gap between ourselves today and the original recipients almost two millennia ago. There is nothing new under the sun. These subtle philosophies are the same old stuff dressed up in new 21st century clothes.

In our day, these same philosophies can be dressed up as “Read your Bible every day, have a quiet time, go to church a lot, make sure you have a family worship time, and pray and fast. Get a biblical worldview!” Is it good for us to read our Bible every day? Of course! Should we pray? Of course! These are lovely byproducts of a life passionately occupied with Jesus Christ. But if we miss the principle

that Paul is laboring to show us, these good fruits can actually turn our eyes away from the Vine from which all these wonderful evidences of grace grow out of. These philosophies are as hidden reefs threatening to capsize our vessel in an apparently safe harbor. Missing the principles dulls our spiritual senses to the real danger. A solid grasp of the principles, on the other hand, puts us on full alert against the alluring and subtle snares within ourselves and within Christendom—not all the pagan philosophies like materialism and hedonism. We can be led astray by the preacher who seems to have a grasp of Greek and Hebrew and even tells us what the words mean. The tragic thing is that these thorns left undetected secretly choke out our hope upon Christ in us, the hope of the glory. Warnings are blessings from God. Warnings serve us by identifying things as they really are and not as they seem. They steer us away from the unfulfilling tares of spiritually sounding wisdom that we may satiate with the Wheat, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Bread of Life.

A Root of Discouragement

The false teachers were not the real problem facing the believers in Colosse. They were the *occasion* that uncovered the root issue for what it was. What was that root problem?

Unlike other churches Paul wrote to in their day, Colosse appears at first to be a fairly low maintenance congregation. They were not experiencing intense persecution like the Thessalonians. They were not strutting around like peacocks with their chests puffed out like the Corinthians were over spiritual gifts. They had not fallen over the cliff into legalism like the foolish Galatians. Yet the problem in Colosse so alarmed the aged apostle it caused him hardship wrestling in prayer over it and to pen this four chapter epistle that we now hold in our hands. What was that problem?

These Colossian saints were doing extremely well in many areas. Paul commends them several times on their faith in Jesus Christ. He says glowingly in chapter 2 verse 5 that he was “rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.” He also recognized the work of God in their love. Upon his hearing of their love in the Spirit, his heart was stirred to pray for them. “We always thank God...when we pray for you, since we heard of...the love that you have for all the saints...” (1:3-4). They had the crown jewel—love—adorning their daily lives. These believers were also commended for spiritual fruit. They were bringing forth fruit from day one that they heard and believed the Gospel (1:6). In many ways, this looked like a vibrant and healthy church! If a visitor came into the Lycus Valley looking for a good church, someone might say, “Oh, you’ve got to check out the church of Colosse!” But there was a subtle problem, lurking beneath the surface that threatened this passionately devoted flock. Only by the infinite wisdom of the Spirit of God was Paul able to detect it. First, the imprisoned apostle put his thumb on the pulse of the problem. The root problem for the Colossians—and for you and me—is discouragement.

When reading and rereading this short epistle, the root problem being discouragement may not jump out at us. We might be so taken up with the loud shouting of the false teachers that we miss the still, small voice of our Teacher. This discouragement is not announced by way of frequent appearance in the

letter but rather in the intensity by which it is presented. Let's closely examine the contents of the letter. We see discouragement marked off in three ways:

- 1) By the spiritual warfare (2:1-3);
- 2) By the commission given to the bearers of the epistle (4:8);
- 3) By the contents of the epistle itself.

Warring for the Discouraged Heart

At the end of chapter 1, Paul wrote, "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me." Paul's toiling to preach Christ is spoken of in martial terms like a conflict against a formidable foe. The Greek word for "struggling" is *agonizomai*, which means to contend for a prize. This is where we get our English word "agonize". The next verse commencing chapter 2 provides more detail about this struggle:

For I want you to know how great a struggle [*agon*] I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged... (Col 2:1-2a)

W. E. Vine's defines "struggle" (Greek *agon*) as "a place of assembly, especially the place where the Greeks assembled for the Olympic and Pythian games". Thayer's defines *agon* as "the place of contest, the arena or stadium". So Paul in a picturesque way ushers the Colossian believers to their seats in a great arena to witness the divine energy of Christ at work in him as he wrestles in prayer against the hosts of darkness. Paul wrote in the sister epistle to Colossians—Ephesians—that we wrestle not with flesh and blood but against the spiritual principalities and powers, those angelic antagonists aligned with Satan against the children of God. Paul wanted these Colossian believers to know this wrestling in intercession on their behalf while he was detained in a Roman house of arrest. What was this great contest being fought over? The purpose is clearly stated: "that their *hearts may be encouraged...*" The word for "that" is the common conjunction *hina*, which we referred to earlier means "in order that"; it denotes purpose. Paul's agonizing in prayer for these Colossian saints had this purpose in view: encouragement! If Paul prayed for them to be *encouraged*, the obvious implication is that they were *discouraged*. So we are invited us to witness this contest, like gladiators in an arena, over a peculiar prize—encouragement.

Commissioned to Encourage

Not only does this intense spiritual wrestling match over discouragement clue us into the real issue with the Colossians, but Paul mentions another significant one. He singles out encouragement as a chief commission he charges his mail carriers.

Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. *I have sent him to you for this very purpose*, that you may know how we are and *that he may encourage your hearts...* (Col 4:7-8)

Paul expressly states why he sent Tychicus to them. The first was to report on Paul's status in Rome. The second reason, more importantly, was "that he may encourage your hearts". His intercessory burden is laid upon the shoulders of trusted Tychicus. Now Tychicus was not just an ordinary mailman, but a close, trusted coworker of the apostle. In Acts 20:4 Tychicus was chosen as a trustworthy courier to accompany Paul to Jerusalem with the gifts from the Gentile church. He was a qualified ministry gift that Paul trusted to relieve Titus on the island of Crete (Titus 3:12). What is implied in the Titus epistle that Tychicus had proven fruit in the characteristics of an overseer. Paul must have observed the continued life of the Lord Jesus that qualified him to oversee, as follows:

if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. (Titus 1:6-9)

Whether or not Tychicus was married with children, we don't know, but the principles of the well-ordered life were at work. Paul's picks were of a high spiritual caliber like Timothy, whom he contrasted with many Christian workers who "[sought] their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (Phil 2:21). In Paul's last letter, Tychicus is still faithfully acting on Paul's behalf, this time providing relief in Ephesus so that Timothy can come quickly to Rome to minister to the aged apostle as his life drew to a close (2 Tim. 4:12-13). In this letter, Paul commends him as "a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord" (Col 4:7). Paul could commit the precious interests of Jesus Christ's to brother Tychicus to bring encouragement to a discouraged group of brothers in Colosse.

So not only did Paul agonize in intercession for their encouragement but he sent a trusted ministry gift to do the same. The apostle administered a gift of consolation that Tychicus operated in to encourage these discouraged saints. Here is a second strong indicator that Paul's thumb was on the pulse of discouragement in the Colossian church.

The Table of Contents: Encouragement

A final indication that discouragement was the root issue facing the Colossian saints is in the contents of the letter itself. The whole epistle is an antidote to discouragement. Paul in big broad strokes paints a colossal Christ who is the centerpiece of creation and the new creation. This galactic, cosmic Christ who they were planted into by the grace of the Father is the same Christ who is the present power to remedy their discouragement. The greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ is the object of hope, the remedy for discouragement.

So the main problem in Colosse was not the false teachers. That was the most observable issue. These were the weeds at the surface. The soil which allowed these weeds to take root was the discouragement of the Colossian Christians. It was their downheartedness that opened the door for these false teachers to gain a foothold in their hearts. Their waning confidence in the Gospel alone was

what enticed these staunch believers in the Lord Jesus to false teachings. The next question is, What were they discouraged about?

Why So Downcast O My Soul?

We can discern what lay at the root of the discouragement by seeing what empty hope the false teachers were holding out. Through chapter 2 Paul builds his case against the false teachers by contrasting their wisdom with Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” After demonstrating the deficiencies of their wisdom, he summarizes it in his closing point directly addressing his opponents:

These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. (Col 2:23)

At the crux of this wisdom was the appeal to holiness: stopping the indulgence of the flesh. That’s what made these messages so appealing. These lovers of the Lord Jesus were perplexed over what to do about their flesh. They wanted to live a holy life but were beset by the recurrence of sin in their lives. Paul addresses some of these problems among the Colossians in chapter 3. “But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth” (Col 3:8). Paul is writing to teach that the same Gospel that saved them from being sons of disobedience is the same Gospel that saves from the present power of indwelling sin. The fact that they were relapsing back into some of their old sins made them look outside the Gospel for help. Somehow they thought that the Gospel was good enough to get them into the kingdom, but to live consistent, holy lives, they had to supplement the Gospel. To keep the flesh down and desiring to please the Lord, they were losing hope in the objective, unchanging truth of the Gospel: Jesus Christ alone is more than enough. To supplement Jesus is to negate Him. This is what alarmed God’s apostle. It should alarm us too.

CHAPTER 4

COLOSSAL THEME #2: JESUS CHRIST, THE HOPE OF GLORY

We have considered the preeminence of Jesus Christ and the root cause of the problem facing the Colossian church: discouragement. Now we wish to turn our attention to another mega-theme—hope—as it appears in this epistle. Hope serves to bridge to crucial gap between discouragement over falling short of God’s glory and Jesus Christ, the hope of God’s glory. Having our hope fixed in something other than the Gospel leads to devastating consequences. Paul is very careful to insure that the people of God are fully persuaded that hope grounded in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work gives all the encouragement needed to glorify and please God in this life.

The specific word “hope” is referenced three times in this epistle. John Piper gives some groundwork in what hope is all about:

Biblical hope is not finger-crossing. It is a confident expectation of good things to come. Hebrews calls it the “full assurance of hope” (6:11).⁵

So hope is not wishing for something to come true, “knocking on wood”, finger-crossing, or other superstitious gestures. In Colossians Paul strategically uses hope as a confident expectation of good things to come—the good works presented in the early verses of chapter 3.

The antidote to discouragement is hope, especially a hope in the *present power* of the Gospel. In God’s “medicine cabinet” He has a big bottle labeled “hope”. Doctor Paul is going to effectively prescribe this medication to cure discouragement and alleviate the symptoms of sin and the flesh. The active ingredient of the “pills” is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. When we see what a preeminent Christ we have and are persuaded that this colossal Christ is committed to glory here and in eternity, hope soars on wings like eagles. This hope best positions our expectant hearts to receive the maximum benefit and timely help from our Great Physician, Jesus Christ.

Hope is God’s strong tower reaching from earth to heaven, casting its refreshing shade across the whole landscape of the epistle. As touching earth, “Christ in you, the hope of glory”; as touching heaven, “the hope laid up for you in heaven” (Col 1:27, 5). Hope, in its ultimate sense, is not a thing, but a Person. Christ Jesus *is* “our hope” (1 Tim 1:1). Words, as we know, can have multiple meanings depending upon context. Hope, as we subjectively experience it in the Christian life, is a favorable expectation directed towards Jesus Christ. “The root of Jesse [Christ] will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope” (Rom 15:12). Hope firmly fastens itself to the root of Jesse—the new and

⁵ John Piper, “Our Hope: The Appearing of Jesus Christ” (retrieved from <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/our-hope-the-appearing-of-jesus-christ> on January 27, 2011)

everlasting King David: the Lord Jesus Christ! Our hope swells to gigantic heights when the colossal, preeminent Lord Jesus Christ becomes the supreme object of our trust.

As Paul teaches about hope, it is the vehicle, the instrument, the means, for the remedy for all ills of the flesh. Our hope in the present power of the Gospel holds out the answer to our inward groaning for liberty from the sin that lurks within our breast. Even more, this hope trusts in the Promiser who will come and produce each and every fruit of righteousness that is pleasing to God in the here and now, as well as the life to come. Am I having marital strife, are the kids driving me crazy, or do other relational conflicts get me down? Hope in the Good News. Am I bombarded with temptations to sin all around? Hope in the Gospel. Your real hope, Christian, is faith in who Christ is and what He has done for you. What that means and how to practically apply this to our every day lives in a fallen world is what this book of Colossians sets out to instruct us in. At the bottom of much preaching in our day is the spoken or unspoken message of “Do more! Try harder!” This hope of the Gospel is strangely absent from the primary content for real help and hope for change.

Tethering Our Hope to the Gospel

Hope is closely linked with possessing or appropriating. Hope precedes possession; when acquisition is realized, hope ceases. Like the eager child whose hope is tethered to the expectation of opening gifts on Christmas day, that hope gives way to possession as that day comes to pass. Paul wrote to the Roman saints:

For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (Rom 8:24-25).

Though it applies to a different context, its basic principle sheds light on hope in Colossians. The Colossians were hoping to see the life of Jesus expressed in their lives. The Gospel is the one-stop-shop for everything needed in the Christian life. These believers had an incomplete understanding that Christ and what He has done is all sufficient to supply every virtue to please God and every victory over indwelling sin. They understood the power this Gospel had in their conversion. “In these you too once walked, when you were living in [sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry]” (Col 3:7). They were defective in their understanding, however, that this same Gospel was totally sufficient to continue empowering their spiritual lives. It worked well for a lot of things, just not everything. This letter, more so than any other, specifically addresses hope in the Gospel for expressing the character of Jesus Christ in everyday life.

The Hope Laid Up for You in Heaven

We are barely five verses deep into the letter when we are first introduced to hope. Paul is grateful to God for the faith and love of these dear saints. In connection with his thanksgiving to God in prayer, Paul takes note of the reason for this love expressed for all the saints.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. (Col 1:3-5)

Notice the phrase “because of the hope”. Paul is saying that the love that they had for all the saints was upon the basis of the hope. The blooming garden of love sprung forth out of the rich soil of hope. Hope is the channel through which love towards the saints comes. Our introduction to hope is raises a few questions that Paul will address later on. What does it mean that hope is being laid up? What does he mean by “the hope...in heaven”? Our first glimpse at hope is a little fuzzy but our focus will be clearer as the Paul unfurls his heart. Hope is spoken of but not explained or defined. This defining will come later. For our first glimpse, hope is simply introduced as a glorious cause of the effect of love. But hope is a great incentive that would have caught the attention of the original recipients of this letter. Paul is holding out the carrot of hope before the horse to pull the cart of faith and love.

Not Shifting from the Hope of the Gospel

Hope takes on additional clarity by its second reference. It is not just any hope, but “the hope of the Gospel”. It is a hope that finds its sphere in the Gospel, the Good News of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Through the first 22 verses of Colossians, Paul has been thanking, praying, and exalting Jesus Christ and what He has done. Then for the first time we get some inklings of danger. Ominous storm clouds are gathering on the horizon.

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard... (Col 1:21-23)

“Shifting” is an interesting Greek word *metakineo* that means “to move or shift from one place to another”. It also means “to shake and shift off”, as used picturesquely in the Septuagint translation of Isaiah:

“For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed [*metakineo*], but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you. (Isaiah 54:10)

The real spiritual war is being waged against the *hope* of the gospel! The enemy seeks to shake and shift off our firm hill-like hope in the Good News. “Shifting” is also in the passive voice, meaning that the Colossians were being acted upon by an outside force. There’s this external force that’s trying to shake and shift off these believers from the firm faith they had received. The kingdom of darkness that God had rescued these saints from (Col 1:13) does not relinquish their operations against their former prisoners. This verb is also in the present tense, meaning that these forces were in continuous activity to shake and shift off the saints from their hope in the Gospel. Paul will later identify these forces of the kingdom of darkness as the human instruments that were preaching and teaching a different message in Colosse. The battleground of faith is being waged between the age old nemeses of the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (see Gen 3:15). The war command of Satan has targeted the hope of the Gospel as its primary objective in Colosse.

Notice that the Spirit of God does not say, “shifted from *the gospel* that you heard”, but says, “shifted from *the hope* of the gospel that you heard”. The front line assault of satanic strategy was not to turn these saints who had trusted in Christ to trust instead in Zeus or Caesar. The unique assault was not to

directly assault the objective facts of the Gospel but to corrupt the *confident expectation* these believers had in the Gospel. “Jesus is really great, just not everything. He’s very tall, just not all.” The demonic hosts had an uphill battle they were fighting, but they found a chink in the armor. Paul used some military terms to describe the Colossian saints as a tough Roman legion in battle formation. He says, “...I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your *good order* and the *firmness* of your faith in Christ.” “Good order” is a military term describing an orderly array of soldiers with the line being unbroken and intact. “Firmness” is another military term that described an army set out in an unbreakable square or immovable phalanx. It presented a solid bulwark against the shock of the enemy’s charge. Paul was rejoicing of such a unified and unyielding front of trust in the Lord Jesus. Yet this did not hinder the enemy from exerting pressure against the weak spot—hope in the Gospel. If a robust church like Colosse can be susceptible to these attacks to shift and shake off the hope of the Gospel, how are we exempt from such bold attacks? We need to learn what it is Paul is saying so we can remain alert and on guard. It is through warnings that we will be presented complete and mature in Christ.

The danger is all the while believing in Jesus Christ while hope in what He wants to do in the present life of the believer wanes. Diminishing hope in the message of God’s grace in Christ increases our susceptibility to subtle messages that actually lead us away from Christ, and in so doing, actually rob of us of our treasures in Him. So hope deferred is not the Gospel itself being shifted but rather the hope of a present day victorious life in Christ that the Good News announced!

Jesus Christ in You, the Hope of Glory

Thus far Paul has introduced a hope being laid up in heaven as the reason behind the faith and love of the Colossian brothers. Then we are given a glimpse into the violent thunderstorm on the horizon of a spiritual conflict threatening to shake and shift off the saints’ hope in the Gospel. Now we are ready to see hope in its clearest visibility: hope is a person. This same colossal Christ depicted in grandiose superlatives is our “hope of glory”.

To [the saints] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. (Col 1:27)

No doubt Jesus Christ is the hope of the glory to come in the not-so-distant future—at the end of all the ages at His return. That is a passion of Paul’s heart—but not what he is laboring to emphasize here. In writing this letter to real group of discouraged believers now, what the Spirit of God inspired through Paul is hope *now*. It is of utmost importance that we see that Christ is the hope of glory now, in the present evil age where we are faced with dangers within and dangers without. The false teachers held out a false hope of glory now by using their employment of spiritual activities (Jewish feasts and Sabbaths), special visions, and commandments of men. These sounded plausible and appeared wise but in reality held out empty promises of victory over the flesh. In contradistinction to these preachers, Paul presented the immensity of Jesus Christ as the unshakeable, immovable anchor of hope. Christ alone is a safe haven from God’s wrath for past sins and from defeat for present indwelling sin. Our hope in the Gospel is an all inclusive package for dealing with sin past (sins forgiven), present (sins overcome) and

future (sins annihilated). These supplemental teachings came as thieves robbing the power and efficacy of Christ for the need of the present hour.

CHAPTER 5

COLOSSAL THEME #3: GOD'S WILLINGNESS

Faith surveys the immense universe of Jesus Christ to lay hold of His ability to help us. Hope is the favorable expectation that Jesus will exercise His power today. Another mega-theme closely connected with hope is God's willingness. We may be absolutely confident in God's ability, but a distrust or doubt about His willingness pours cold water on the flames of biblical hope. Take as an illustration the leper that came to Jesus in Luke 5. The leper had a vibrant confidence in Jesus' ability to cleanse him of his leprosy. What he lacked, though, was an assurance of His willingness.

While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." (Luke 5:12)

Jesus' reply sparked fresh hope and faith.

And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him. (Luke 5:13)

Understanding that God is not only able but willing is the fuel that emblazons our hope. Hope flourishes not because we know God is able. Hope flourishes because we know that God both has the power and the willingness to do it. His willingness is what anchors our hope in the objective reality of truth, not just wishful thinking. Paul prays to secure our confidence in understanding how willing God is to live in a way that is well-pleasing. By God making Jesus Christ preeminent in the natural universe, Paul makes the connection to His willingness to make Him preeminent in every circumstance of our spiritual lives. As Christ is preeminent in the universe, so Christ aims to be preeminent in every believer. Paul notes God's willingness to make Jesus Christ abundant to every needy Christian in his letter to the Corinthians:

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. (2Cor 9:7-8)

The cheerful, voluntary heart of giving that God expects of us only mirrors His own heart. God is the ultimate cheerful giver, expressing His incessant giving in making all grace abounding to us. Here we see God's willingness and ability joined together for grace now. All grace abounding to us is the active working of Christ on the behalf of undeserving sinners. Colossians expresses this same grace abounding principle Jesus Christ, our life, being manifested. The results of Christ revealed is our being manifested with Jesus in glory, the mighty power (i.e. grace) that works mightily in us to put off sins and put on godly character.

The core component of Paul's prayer for these Colossians is that they would be filled with the knowledge of His will.

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord... (Col 1:9-10)

The "knowledge of his will" is not just a generic, blanket statement. While it is true that we are to be informed about the will of God in a broad sense (i.e. "whole counsel of God"), Paul has a specific application in light of his intended audience. The will that Paul labors the rest of the letter to communicate is God's willingness to make Jesus preeminent. It is God's willingness to make the Gospel the supreme expression of giving up His own Son for all.

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Rom 8:32)

God the Father wills to reveal Christ. This is His supreme joy! "But when it pleased God...to reveal His Son in me" (Gal 1:15-16, NKJV). It pleases God to reveal His Son, not only to Paul, but to us as well. God's willingness is overwhelming implied in chapters 3 and 4 of Colossians by the lavish parade of gospel tidings to be showcased in the lives of believers. God is totally committed to give Christ, for example, as evidenced by the putting to death of sins. Putting sins to death is impossible except that God is constantly and frequently willing to reveal Christ as our life and us to be revealed with Him in glory. The command in 3:5 to "put to death" is solidly rooted in the facts of Jesus' death and resurrection and blossoms through the present employment of God's grace. The command in 3:8 to "put off all these" is basically a reinforcement of the first admonition to "put to death". Then Paul shifts gears from putting off to putting on. The "Canaanites" are thrown out in order that we might enjoy the good of the Promised Land. The command in 3:10 says to put on the new man. The Greek word for "put on" is the same verb as one would use to put on clothing or getting dressed. In writing to the Romans, Paul develops the same theme as presented in Colossians 3:

Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But *put on the Lord Jesus Christ*, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (Rom 13:13-14)

So here Paul is saying to "put off" drunkenness, sexual immorality, quarreling and jealousy, a list of similar sins as our Colossians text. But note what we are to put on: the Lord Jesus Christ! The Father stands ready to fit us with our Wardrobe—the Lord Jesus Christ.

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1Cor 1:30)

The glad tidings are that we who were once enemies of God and objects of His wrath have been forgiven and placed into Jesus Christ. Because of our standing in grace, God does something remarkable: He makes Christ Jesus our sanctification. In other words, as we alluded to earlier, Christ Himself is our holiness, our virtue, our godly character. Jesus Christ indeed is preeminent and we stand in the glory

that seems like it emanates from us. But it doesn't; it is Jesus Christ in us manifested through us. Our outer life is defined by the Lord Jesus Christ being put on analogous to wearing royal attire.

The command in 3:12 to "put on", like the "put to death" earlier, is grounded in the objective reality of Jesus' death and resurrection and manifested by the grace of Christ. Because "Christ is all, and in all" verse 11 affirms, the believer is able to "put on".

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience (Col 3:12)

These imperatives (commands) of putting off and putting on are organically linked to Christ our life being revealed. We are able to "put on" Christ because He *is all*—compassionate, kind, humble, meek and patient—and *in all*—that is, in every believer regardless of race, religious background, or social status. Christ is universally available to all saints and is the source of every trace of Christian character. The willing Father makes the Savior Son as available as air to breathe or soil for the tree. The command to "put on" is predicated upon the colossal willingness of the Father to manifest His colossal Christ. And when He does, we appear with Him in glory! All the fullness dwells in Jesus Christ and that is ours from appropriating! Thanks be to God for qualifying us who were once under the just sentence of condemnation of wrath!

CHAPTER 6

A BURDEN FOR THE PRESENT POWER OF CHRIST IN THE GOSPEL

A popular digital animation film for children, *Cars*, features a prideful, cherry red race car named Lightning McQueen. McQueen dreams of winning the “Piston Cup” to become the number 1 race car sponsored by a prestigious sponsor. During the final lap of the race, in order to save time, McQueen risks not making a pit stop to replace his well-worn tires. His gamble fails and both rear tires blow out with the black and white checkered flag waving in sight. In a desperate struggle to reach the finish line, the rims scrape and spark the last yards as McQueen snails along at a sluggish pace. The two lagging competitors quickly catch up and the race ends in a dramatic three-way tie.

Now we have come to my burden for writing. I am burdened that the unshakeable hope in the colossal Christ and a clear assurance of the Father’s willingness is slowed to a crawl going into the home stretch of chapters 3 and 4. Too often the rear tires blow out because the principles of Colossians 3:1-4 get punctured by importing other biblical texts to ascertain their meaning rather than the context with which they are found. The practical sections of Colossians still move forward, but at a tremendous loss of momentum.

All that has come up to this point has simply been an introduction. I’m concerned that these pivotal verses starting chapter 3 that link the inworking (receiving) of the Gospel with the outworking (fruit) of the Gospel lose its intended power. One concern centers upon the phrases “seeking the things above”. An generic understanding of this phrase dulls the direction and muffles the warning. But even more deflating than this is how many interpret “When Christ who is your life appears”. The common understanding is this refers exclusively to the Lord Jesus Christ’s Second Coming. Yet the mega-themes of Colossians lend a more restrictive sense that taps the Christian more directly into the power source for living the Christian life. By relegating this to the Second Coming in the future, the momentum transfers from the tire (Christ our life) to the naked rim (our motivation), and sadly, sluggishness is the progress of spiritual growth is the inevitable result.

CHRIST’S PREMINENCE: APPEARING WITH HIM IN GLORY

One of the mega-themes of Colossians is the Lord Jesus Christ’s preeminence in everything. Let’s unpack our key verses in chapter 3 to make some observations how that all-pervading theme of preeminence influences it.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col 3:1-4)

We will circle back to the conclusion of an argument that Paul has been ramping up all through chapters 1 and 2, but for now we will just focus our attention on one verse, with an eye to the preeminence of Jesus Christ. “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” The imagery here clearly is designed to lead our mind to the glories of Christ when He comes back again. Jesus, who is hidden from the eyes of the world and our own eyes of natural sight, will be revealed again from heaven in glory. “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.” The church of the living God has precious promises that when Jesus Christ is revealed, she will be changed, the dead in Christ raised with bodies glorious and incorruptible. Truly it will be a glorious day!

But does Paul have in mind here the *exclusive* idea of Jesus Christ at His Second Coming? I want to suggest a number of thoughts from the colossal themes of Colossians to strongly suggest that though the Second Coming is in view, it is with a purpose to highlighting a spiritual principle that impacts our everyday life. Our hearts should be delighted that there is more of Christ offered to us here than the Bridegroom lover of our souls coming back for His bride, as fabulous and fantastic as that is!

Christ’s Appearing in Glory – Now or Not Yet?

“When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” This is often applied to Christ’s Second Coming. It is a wonderful truth that the Second Coming is the supreme expression of Christ our life! When Jesus comes again, the dead will be raised (1Th 4:13-18); death will be swallowed up in victory. Those who are alive and remain shall be changed (1Cor 15:50-55). When we see Him, we shall be like Him (1 Jn 3:2).

It wasn’t the Second Coming of Christ that transformed Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. It was a spiritual coming that modeled spiritual principles that are true of every true conversion. What happened in dramatic fashion that day is loaded with spiritual principles and realities for the present Christian life. For example, when Paul was blinded for three days to this world, true conversion blinds us to the world, as Paul went on to say, “I am crucified to the world, and the world to me.” In 2 Corinthians 3:18 this transformation from glory to glory is not Christ’s Second Coming when He brings an end to sin and ushers in the completion of all things. Rather, the Christian life is a continual series of “comings” of Christ by the Spirit of God unveiling Him from the Word of God. When we orient our hearts to the Spirit of the Lord, He in turn lifts the veil of the Word. In other words, He illumines our understanding to see Jesus Christ in His Word. He that reveals is also He that transforms.

While our appearing with the Lord Jesus Christ in glory is a breath-taking truth when He comes again, let’s not miss the magnitude of this truth as a present principle now. Let us not look for Christ revealed merely with eyes of flesh but the eyes of the heart that discern spiritual reality in our world. Principles of future truth reveal present principles in this life. The Bible reveals the future not just to reveal what is to come but to crystallize principles about the heart of God at all times. For example, death will be swallowed up by life.

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (Rom 8:11)

Although many saints have gotten comfort from this passage for healing or for future resurrection, the context of Romans 8 sees it primarily in light of obedience to God in this present evil age. The Spirit gives life to your mortal flesh to obey God. This life we receive from the Spirit also can be summarized as changing from glory to glory. We fully become like our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ when He comes again (1 Jn 3:2). We are also being changed from glory to glory, becoming progressive more like Him, when the Spirit opens our minds to Christ's glory in the Bible (2Cor 3:18). The main difference is that Christ's return ushers in final glorification, whereas now we are experiencing it by degrees. Jesus in us, the hope of glory, shines out of us as glory—not physical light or a halo, but the essence of love to God and man. God the Father is willing to take us forward from Christ in us as a hope for glory to Christ our life as glory revealed! What a source of encouragement that Christ is us as a hope of glory is also Christ through us as glory manifested. Faith must take one more step upwards by laying hold upon the truth of God's willingness to do it.

Appearing with Christ in Glory: The Beautiful Ornaments of Grace

How does Christ's preeminence play into our understanding of our key verses?

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

In one sense when Christ appears, it will be an appearing to the eyes of sense, as will be when He comes again with all the saints and angels. "And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13:26). But there is another sense, and no less real than natural seeing, where Christ appears to the eye of faith. As God has made Jesus Christ preeminent in the created universe, so He intends to make Christ preeminent in His church. Paul wrote elsewhere that the life of Jesus is already appearing, is already being manifested, through individual members of His body. The appearing of the life of Christ is not His glorious Second Coming, but His present grace through the Gospel:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way . . . always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. (2 Cor 4:7-8, 10)

As Paul unpacks the rest of chapter 3, he will draw out a glorious list of the revealed life of Christ: mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness, and love. When these characteristics manifest in the life of a Christian, *this is Christ* appearing with him in glory! Or to phrase it as Paul did in 2 Corinthians, this is "the life of Jesus [being] manifested in our bodies". Every time a believer manifests the love of Christ, this is Christ, who is our life, appearing in glory. "Well, I don't feel Jesus." Let us lay aside our subjective feelings and let faith take in the objective truths of God's Word. The wonderful union of Christ and His people puts on display the beautiful ornaments of grace in the character. The balance of Scripture attests to this glorious truth of union with Christ and His people.

In Acts 3 it was Peter who held out his hand to the lame beggar at Gate Beautiful. People saw the miracle and attributed it to Peter. Yet Peter could not take the credit, for that miracle was not performed by Peter. It was God revealing the glory of the Lord Jesus through the apostle. Peter corrected his audience's misconceptions, saying,

Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus... (Acts 3:12-13, ESV).

God the Father openly glorified openly the hidden life of His servant Jesus. So what we were seeing at first *seemed like* Peter healing the lame man was in reality Jesus Christ healing him. It was not Peter endowed with special inherent powers that made the cripple walk. The observable miracle was a glorification of Jesus Christ Himself. Christ, who was hidden in heaven, through Peter became made manifest on earth. In the language of Colossians 3, Peter appeared with the preeminent Lord Jesus Christ in glory. It was the invisible Jesus and not the visible Peter who was the preeminent figure in this display of God's glory. "God...glorified his servant Jesus..."

Jesus Christ Leads Us to the Mount of Transfiguration

While Jesus walked on earth in His incarnate body, Peter was one of the privileged three that accompanied Him on the Mount of Transfiguration. In a unique instance we see the radiant glory of God in the face of Christ. After Peter awoke, he witnessed the Lord having a conversation with Moses and Elijah, the Old Testament's representatives of the Law and the Prophets. Notice how Jesus is preeminent here and how glory is ascribed solely to Him:

Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake *they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him* (Luke 9:32).

Note that Luke does not draw attention to Moses and Elijah having glory; the glory is exclusively applied to the Lord Jesus. Christ is the radiant glory where all human glory fades away and disappears completely. Moses and Elijah were bathed in the glory of the Sovereign Lord much like the shepherds on the Bethlehem hillside shone with the glory of the Angel of the Lord. Moses and Elijah had no glory of their own; it was borrowed from Jesus Christ. So it is with every believer that no flesh can boast.

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col 3:4)

Like Moses and Elijah our glory is not a glory of our own but an outshining of the radiance of Jesus Christ through clay vessels. The glory on display now is not physical light like sunshine but what Paul showcases in the rest of chapter 3 and 4. The glory of God in Christ put on display now is the radical transformation of character into the likeness of Jesus Christ when He walked upon the earth. So we are not to look for halos over our heads or faces shining like angels but the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness. The glory is fathers not provoking their children and children obeying their parents in all things. The glory is wives submitting to their own husbands and servants working unto the Lord. The glory is prayer and evangelism. The glory is Christ, who is the life, coursing and pulsating

through His people moment by moment with the same never ceasing faithfulness that He maintains every star, planet and comet in perfect synchronicity in the universe.

“You also will appear with Him in glory.” What a grand statement about Jesus Christ being preeminent! It is not Jesus appearing with us in glory, but the other way around. We appear with Jesus, the preeminent one, the one who perennially has the first place. The glory only appears to be ours because it is our face that wears it, but it is really Christ in us, the hope of glory, piercing through.

We read in chapter 1, “He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.” We who have been united to Christ in His death experience a union with Him in His resurrection glory. Jesus holds everything together in the universe by the word of His power. We don’t see this with our natural eyes, but faith trusts what God has revealed about Christ in the Word of God. Jesus holds everything together in our spiritual lives too. And more than that, this verse assures us that when the likeness of Christ appears in our lives, it is Christ appearing in glory through us. May God give us spiritual eyes to see it in ourselves and others to the effect of much joy, thankfulness and praise to our great Savior, Jesus Christ!

CHAPTER 7

FROM GLORY HOPED FOR TO GLORY ENJOYED

Because Jesus Christ is preeminent, He is the center and source of every manifestation of eternal life—victory over sin and spectacular displays of Christlikeness in character. The preeminence of the Vine supplies all life to every branch united to Him. Christ’s preeminence assures us of His ability exerted everywhere, at any time, in everybody. The second mega-theme we surveyed was the hope of the Gospel. How does this large theme aid our understanding of our pivotal verses at the beginning of chapter 3?

Hope views the preeminent Lord Jesus for appropriating Him today and every day. When a Christian remains fixed in the hope of this Gospel, incredible events occur. The wonderfully amazing thing that happens is that hope—that which is not yet seen—transitions to actual possession and enjoyment of the glory of God. In other words, faith in the pure Gospel of grace works; nothing else needs to be added to it. Christ in you—saints rescued by God through Christ’s suffering and death—is the hope of glory. Carefully observe what is transpiring here:

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col 3:3-4)

In these verses, Christ in you as a *hope* of glory makes a fantastic advance. Christ inside of you as a future promise of glory to come shines forth as glory today expressed and observed.

The Outshining Life Fueled by Present Grace

The prophet Isaiah, many centuries prior, foretold about this wondrous advance of the glory of the Lord to His people.

Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you. (Isaiah 60:1-2)

It is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s ancient prophecy of the Lord arising upon His people and His glory being seen upon them. The rest of chapter 3 and chapter 4 illustrate the Christian appearing with Jesus in glory. Do you want to know what appearing with Him in glory means in practice? Chapter 3 sketches the life of Christ in principles—putting off sin, putting on of God’s divine nature, and transforming our relationships to others. Do you want some examples of what appearing with Him in glory looks like? Chapter 4 exhibits a trophy case of blood-bought sinners who experienced the transforming power of this message of Colossians. These were not herculean supermen that we cannot identify with. These

are men of flesh with like passions as ourselves who embraced the simple message of Colossians. Tychicus or Onesimus or Epaphras each showcases the glory of Christ in a variety of ways for our encouragement.

First Manifestation of the Hidden Life: Victory Over Sin

When Christ, who is our hidden life become our glory, the outshining life that is observable to the outside world, what does that look like? The first expression is victory over sin.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. (Col 3:5)

This “therefore” is one of those common conjunctions in Scripture of cause and effect. The “put to death” is the result or logical conclusion of that which preceded it. To really understand how we are put to death what is earthly in us, we have to turn around and consider what “what Christ who is your life appears” means. All too often Christians reach in to Colossians and yank this verse out of context. And like a flower uprooted from its garden habitat, it begins to wither and die. Instead of the spiritual life it was originally intended to convey, like a withered flower it only produces death. Wrongly applied, it lies in a coffin alongside the list of other dead end streets Paul addressed in chapter 2. The beauty and fragrance of this command necessitates we explore it in the lush garden of neighboring verses for it to yield its sweet nectar to our Christian lives. Our attempts to “put to death” without holding fast the wide-eyed view of what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ (chapters 1 and 2) yields a perplexing and paralyzing dilemma where the Colossians were also in. So we better pay careful attention to the “therefore” and understand (as the cliché says) what it’s “there for”.

How do I put to death what is earthly in me? The question the Colossians wrestled discouragingly over is the question Christians of every age have. The “therefore” points beyond our death in Christ, resurrection, and being seated in Him in the heavenlies. These all are important qualifiers for inheriting victory over sin in this life. Because we are dead to sin and alive in Christ, we are encouraged to seek and set our minds on the above. This “therefore” most logically connects with God manifesting Christ and our being manifested with Him in glory. When Christ is manifested and we are manifested with Him in glory, therefore we are to put to death at once what is earthly in us. The reality of Jesus Christ our life manifested is glory. Jesus has been presented earlier as “the hope of glory”. Here we see a further progression from glory hoped for to glory possessed. And the first thing Paul draws our attention to is that glory is victory over indwelling sin! Sexual immorality is put to death as we are in union with Christ. We are involved, but the power and the glory of the putting to death is Christ’s. Impurity is not conquered by doing more and trying harder but by trusting more and believing better. Sin has already been conquered by our Conqueror. By seeking and minding the Gospel, the Father reveals His Son to us in a life transforming way over remaining indwelling sin. When our lives are free from the domination of sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, we are appearing with Christ in glory. Christ in us as a hope of glory has flourished to Christ through us as glory itself. This glory is the grace of Christ, what Christ does on our behalf, totally undeserved by any merit on our part.

So our putting to death the sins of the flesh is directly dependent upon the grace of God, that is, the activity of God which He performs on our behalf. That activity is what we have been considering, namely, Christ appearing—not His Second Coming but His continual coming through our experience of seeing Him in the Gospel, the good news written down in the Word of God. Our volitional cooperation with grace does not tap into our abilities or willpower; rather it is done “with all his energy that he powerfully works within [us]” (Col 1:29). Our part of seeking the above and setting our minds on the above is overabundantly answered by God’s part of revealing Jesus. Our seeking is the *means* of grace; Christ’s being revealed is the *grace itself* that effects the mortifying of our flesh.

The revelation of Christ welcomed by faith is synonymous with receiving Christ. “As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.” “When Christ who is your life appears” is the great object upon which our faith rests. His appearance is another occasion to receive Christ Jesus the Lord. As we receive Him, so we also walk in Him. Paul illustrates this same principle again and again in Colossians. “When Christ who is your life appears...Put to death *therefore* what is earthly in you.” The putting to death is another way of saying “so walk in Him”. A chief characteristic of walking in Christ is walking in the light where there is no darkness of sin.

We breathe because air is readily available. We see because light is immediately accessible. We put to death what is earthly in us because the Father makes Christ our life preeminent to us. As our head as preeminent to our body, Christ is to His corporate body, the church. As we hold “fast to the Head”, from whom all life and supply flow, we grow “with a growth that is from God” (Col 2:19). The jubilee trumpet of Colossians heralds that God has made Christ Jesus readily available and immediately accessible to all His body. God has made Christ the power of God unto salvation, a salvation that is past and on-going and one day will be fully consummated when He comes again.

Don’t Devalue the Present Power of the Gospel

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. (Col 3:5)

Let us not fail to consider that the “put to death” is following a line of continuity through this epistle. Not only does the “therefore” connect the continuity from the verses immediately preceding it, but it also sums up the whole long line of the argument developed in chapter 2. After Paul summarizes his argument here, his case is closed and the false teachers walk out of the courtroom, never to be heard from again. The climax of Paul’s expose of the false teachers is this: they cannot deliver real and lasting results.

These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. (Col 2:23)

Whereas the false teachers’ messages have no value to put to death the indulgence of the flesh, what Paul has just presented *does*. He confidently asserts that Christ being revealed does what no earthly commandment, festival, ascetic practice, philosophy or otherwise can achieve. Only Christ manifested has value to put the flesh to death. So what the Colossians were looking for they already had in the

Gospel. The putting to death of 3:5 is placed in direct contrast to “no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” in 2:23. These Old Covenant techniques and commandments of men appeared to be wise. But Paul shows they are devoid of power to “put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion...” They appear to have results, but in reality they have no results at all. Only the pure of grace of Christ to us through the Gospel has any value for true change. Man’s performance is another feeble attempt to add to what Jesus does. The Gospel alone is truly successful in putting to death sin and putting on the attractiveness of Jesus Christ.

“They are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.” The Greek word for “value” (*time*) means value, price or honor. All these teachings that try to supplement the Gospel are worthless. Like a counterfeit diamond, they appeared to be worth much but were worth zero. They are absolutely valueless in comparison with the incomparable, unsearchable riches found in Christ. It is Christ “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:2). These other philosophies are picturesquely portrayed as thieves and robbers.

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ (Col 2:8).

The words “takes...captive” is *sulagogo*, which means can mean to carry away captive and also to plunder the spoils obtained by a victory in battle. Both meanings are very applicable here. These so-called philosophers offer a wealth of wisdom but really plunder the Christian’s treasure chest—Christ. Taking heed to these elemental spirits of the world leaves him beggarly and poor to walk in a manner that’s worthy of the Gospel. In Galatians 4:9 Paul declares that the law is weak and beggarly. Beggarly is a poverty not in that it does not have anything extra left over but having nothing at all. The end result is that these looking-away-from-Christ philosophies carry away captive and enslave the Christian. Instead of finding true liberty and freedom in Jesus Christ as it was when they first saw the Lord, the bondage of works and legalism comes in.

A New Motive or a New Power?

“When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Some interpret this verse to mean that our expecting the Lord’s return provides the *motivation* for putting the flesh to death. Before I was saved, I didn’t have the right motivation for being victorious over the sins of my flesh. Now that I am saved, I can obey God out of a new motive of loving His appearing. Having a motive of love and gratitude for God is very important in our obedience. 1 Corinthians 13 makes it very clear that without love everything we do is like a noisy, irritating gong.

Yes, it is true in other places in Scripture that the knowledge of Christ’s return does motivate us. The apostle John wrote, “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:1-2). John asserts that having a hope in seeing Jesus Christ at His Second Coming does motivate us to purify ourselves. The Colossian Christians were motivated to purify their conduct but were being tempted to use the wrong soap!

Paul has in another epistle urged his readers to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13). In our salvation experience, God works in us to give us a willing heart like Jesus, who ever says, “I delight to do Your will” (Ps 40:8). Not only does the future glorification promised with Christ’s Second Coming encompass a radical change of heart motives, but so does our understanding of Christ’s past performance as revealed in the Gospel. But as we have observed, the willingness that is highlighted in this epistle is the Father’s willingness, not our willingness. The hope for the discouraged heart is not first and foremost upon *our* willingness but upon *God’s*. It is true that God works in us to make us willing for His good pleasure. But what dissipates our discouragement in failing to measure up to the Father’s good pleasure is a clear understanding of His willingness to make Christ preeminent in working out our salvation. So motives are no doubt important and do factor into our obedience, but in treating the delicate situation in Colosse, the Spirit is emphasizing God who works in you to *work* for His good pleasure. And that working is according to the preeminence of Jesus Christ through the revelation of Him in the word of the truth of the Gospel.

What is being emphasized here in the Colossian letter—a new motive or a new power? Does our inheritance of being complete in Christ, in whom all the fullness of the Godhead bodily dwells, speak towards a new motivation or a new power? Paul makes a logical argument based upon the activity of Christ: “when Christ who is your life appears”. Because of this appearing of Christ, Paul draws this conclusion: “Put to death *therefore* what is earthly in you...” Let’s circle back to the transition verses 1 to 4. Let’s read through the section and observe what God has done and what God will do.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

What God *has done* is summed up in that He raised us with Christ, put to death the old man (“you have died”), and hid our life with Christ. What God *will do* is all based upon what He has done for us in the Gospel. What God *will do* is make Christ to appear to us. This is the chief work of God that has immediate relevance towards putting sin to death and putting on Christ in the verses to follow.

This newness of life in the heavenlies in Christ is the reason for pursuing “the above”, which are means of grace of receiving the Gospel, like preaching, teaching, praying, and singing. We will go into this in more detail in the next chapter. Now Paul is taking us one step further from seeking and setting our affections on the above to actually possessing Christ our inheritance in whom all the fullness dwells.

When the Father Reveals Christ Your Life

Let’s unpack verse 4 carefully so we can see how what God does impacts how we live in Christ while sojourning in this fallen world.

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Both “appear” verbs are in the passive voice. Passive voice means that the subject is being acted upon by someone or something else. It is the opposite of the active voice which means the subject is performing the action. So “when Christ who is your life appears” is not referring to Jesus Christ acting on His own behalf to openly show Himself. Rather, this unveiling of the hidden Christ is conducted by Another, namely God the Father or God the Spirit, for it is the Father who reveals the Son (Matt 11:27) through the Spirit. I’m not going to be dogmatic here if the revealer is the Father or the Spirit because it is ambiguous here and the balance of Scripture affirms that both are true. A better sense of the text might read, “When Christ who is your life is made to appear.” If the clause had been in the active voice, it might have read, “When God reveals Christ who is your life”.

At this point it would help the English reader to understand a little more of the richness of the word “appear”. The Greek *phaneroo* (FAN-er-AH-oh) means to show openly something which had been hidden. It means to disclose or to manifest in such a way that something is seen and understood as it is in reality. We can see something without understanding the meaning behind it. That is not what it is intended. When Judas kissed the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, to the soldiers and temple guards it was a signal to identify who to arrest. To the oblivious disciples, it appeared simply as a typical Jewish greeting. Both groups saw the same thing, but only one understood the true meaning behind it. *Phaneroo* is not the casual seeing of the disciples but the full disclosure of the gesture to the soldiers. So Paul is pointing to a manifestation of Christ that discloses visibly the objective reality as it is in truth, not along the surface of human perception.

For instance, Christ is manifested through His church all the time, but the world does not physically see the Lord. Ephesians says we wrestle not with flesh and blood but the unseen spiritual powers behind it. On the level of earth, as we read Acts it looks like people are out to get Paul, persecuting him, stoning him, chasing him from town to town, and imprisoning him. *Phaneroo*, if it had been used in this connection, would have been a revealing of the unseen principalities and powers, the real forces of Satan behind the instruments which our eyes can see. Or to use a familiar story in 2 Kings, the prophet Elisha said to his fearful servant, when surrounded by the armies of the enemy, “There is more for us than for them.” Elisha had eyes that understood the true reality behind his eyes of flesh. He could see all the horses and chariots of fire surrounding them and protecting him.

This is the basic idea behind the Greek word *phaneroo*. It is the spiritual reality of Christ our life being manifested. It may mean Christ actually visible, as when He shall appear on the clouds with great glory. But the balance of Scripture also can mean Christ not physically visible but nonetheless actually manifested. After Saul of Tarsus’ spiritual eyes were opened, he was shocked to learn that all those Christians he had been persecuting were the Lord. “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *Me*?” Though the world does not see Jesus visibly, that does not mean He is not really appearing, just as the angelic principalities and power are unseen but manifested by the people through whom they operate. We walk by faith in what the word of God affirms and not what our eyes tell us.

Next I’d like to draw your attention to the word “then”:

When Christ who is your life appears, then...

The Greek word for then is *tote*, an emphatic then, used only once in Colossians. It is a rarer conjunction that is specifically chosen when the author desires to draw our attention to the cause and effect. So when God reveals Christ, *then and only then*, will we appear in glory with Him.

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Thus, our appearing in glory (our walking in Him spelled out in chapters 3 and 4) is dependent upon the Father revealing Christ through the Holy Spirit. We will be manifested and disclosed with Christ to a watching world as we truly are in reality. But before this can happen, the Father must openly disclose Christ our life to us as we are seeking and minding the above.

Jesus Christ Takes Us through Gate Beautiful

A classic case of God manifesting the Lord Jesus is in Acts 3 with Peter and the healing of the lame man at Gate Beautiful. The hand of the Galilean fisherman revealed the unseen heavenly hand of the Fisher of men—Christ, who strengthened the useless legs of the man lame from birth. Peter had to clear up the misconceptions of the crowd whose natural hearts were bent on wrongly attributing what Christ did to the instrument Christ used.

“Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, *glorified his servant Jesus*”. (Acts 3:12-13)

God glorified, or made conspicuously manifest, His servant Jesus. This illustrates the principle that when God manifested Jesus Christ, Peter appeared with Him in glory. Peter was very careful to point out to his observers that the glory they were observing was Jesus Christ’s and not Simon Peter’s. What the Lord Jesus began to do and teach, He continues to do and teach through His body, the Church (Acts 1:1). Colossians affirms this same principle: Jesus Christ continues to put sin to death. He is exercising His kingly authority on the throne, putting all enemies under His feet. The Lord Jesus Christ appears in glory to make spiritually lame—crippled by sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness and other sins of the flesh—to walk through Gate Beautiful, the perfect soundness promised of eternal life through the Gospel.

The lame man at Gate Beautiful points to more than just a physical miracle. The lame man’s story is our story. We, too, are crippled from birth; it is a crippling disease called sin. Because of sin we cannot walk with God apart from a miracle. The command of God to rise and walk is no less supernatural than any other commandment, for no man can do them without Christ. “Husbands, love your wives *as Christ...*” “Forgive one another *as Christ*”. “Therefore be perfect *even as your Father is perfect.*” Because of sin, we have been crippled in our ability to walk in a manner worthy of God, just as that lame man could not walk in and out of Gate Beautiful. Jesus Christ is the One who takes us through “Gate Beautiful”, transforming our deformities of sin that have marred and defaced the image of God in us.

So we can rejoice when we observe the love of God in His people, for what we are seeing is the Father revealing His Son. These are not larger than life people with special inherent powers of a holiness of

their own. These are not genetically advantaged people with patience and love. The manifestation of love is the Father making Christ as preeminent in His body, the church, as He is in the created universe. When Paul prays because of his perceiving the Colossians' love for all the saints, he thanks the Father and the Son. The thanks directed towards God for their love goes to Him because *He* is the source of it, not the Colossian saints. Paul knows that brotherly love is because of the direct intervention of God to clothe His people with Christ, who is love.

Paul in other letters testifies of this same truth. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Php 1:21). "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Paul lived an exchanged life—Christ's life in place of his life. Paul's teaching to these Colossian saints that Christ in them as the hope of glory was not some theory of an "ivory tower" theologian but worked out in the highways and byways of his trials filled pilgrimage on earth. When Paul encourages the saints to seek the above so that Christ their life would be revealed and they with glory, he is speaking from personal experience. The life he lived in the flesh was Christ living through him. What people were observing about Paul's Christlikeness was Jesus Christ. God was revealing Jesus Christ, his hidden life, and Paul appeared with Him in glory. The glory—again, not physical light—was the life of Christ revealed in his flesh.

The Might of God's Glory

When Christ appears, power is present. Paul in Colossians uses a unique phrase that marries together the idea of glory and might, the power source energizing all life. In chapter 1 verse 11 he writes,

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might...

The phrase "his glorious might" is literally "the might of the glory of Him". His glory has might? Does that sound strange to your ears as it did mine at first? Perhaps that's why the translators took liberty to make it an adjective (glorious) rather than its actual noun form (glory). Paul has made this connection between God's power and His glory in Jesus' resurrection:

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:4)

It was the glory of the Father that raised Jesus from the dead. That glory was not an itty bitty flashlight illuminating a lifeless body. The Father's glory is the manifestation of His mighty power! Paul testified of this fact in Ephesians:

...the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead... (Eph 1:19-20)

So Romans 6 asserts that it was the glory of the Father that raised Christ while Ephesians 1 affirms that it was the working of His great might, the immeasurable greatness of His power! There is no contradiction here, for both are true. Christ was raised by the Father's glory and power. Paul combines both by his

use of the phrase “the might of the glory of Him” in Colossians 1:11. What is the purpose of God’s glory possessing immeasurable might? Paul’s prayer for the Colossians reveals that purpose:

May you be strengthened with all power, according to [the might of His glory], for all endurance and patience with joy (Col 1:11)

The reason we need to be strengthened with all power is for the purpose of joyful patience and endurance. The virtuous trait of patience is included in chapter 3, amplified further by the clause “bearing with one another”. The reason the believer can put on the life of the new man (e.g. patience) goes back to the crux of his argument in the preceding verses. Because Christ our life is manifested, we appear with Him in glory. The glory of God has mighty power. In chapter 1 Paul prays for empowerment for all patience. In chapter 3 Paul shows that the answer to that prayer is accomplished by the revelation of Jesus Christ, who is the glory of God. It is also the same pattern laid down in the prayer that Paul first prayed for light (“be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding”) and then power (“be strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory”). In chapter 3 after he has been able to bring the Colossians’ minds along by reasoning in the Scripture, he shows clearly the cause and effect relationship between glory and might. The immeasurable greatness of His power comes to us every time the Father reveals Jesus Christ as our life from His Word. This is how we are strengthened with all power for all endurance and patience with joy. We become participants of the glory by setting our minds on the things above.

So this is one indication that Paul has more in mind than Christ’s Second Coming when he says,

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Christ being made to appear in glory is life to us. It is a glory with might, an energy far superior to that which is foreshadowed by our plant world and the sunshine. His glory bears with it “the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe”. When Christ, the power of God, is revealed, He is made power to us. This power, then, is evidenced in chapter 3, verse 5 where we are called upon to mortify (as the King James Version puts it), or put to death, our flesh. Where exactly is the might of this glory manifested? We will examine that later in more specific and practical ways in what Paul means by seeking the things above in the following chapter.

Hope Heals the Discouraged Heart

What we need in our day is what these discouraged believers in Colosse needed in their day. Hope is the antidote to discouragement, especially a hope in the present power of the Gospel, the Good News of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. To the degree our hope in the message of God’s grace in Christ diminishes, our attraction to other messages that actually lead us away from Christ increases. We become more at risk of being swept along by the undertow of the “Do more! Try harder!” preaching of our day. I find often times that “preacher” is my own mind, still requiring renewing from the natural bent towards legalism. Only the hope of the Gospel offers real help and hope for change. Paul preached Christ, being rooted in Him, built up in Him, holding fast to Him, seeking and minding the above which has Christ as its supreme focal point. A life aligned with heeding God’s wisdom of the

Gospel is the fertile field in which the Husbandman yields His choicest fruits. God the Father will manifest His Son to the seeking heart, and in so revealing Him, imparting overcoming power and glory of eternal life!

Hope detours our discouragement over falling short of God's glory away from empty messages and methods that appear wise over to Jesus Christ, the hope of glory. Having our hope fixed in something other and smaller than the Gospel leads to devastating consequences. Life—not rules, religious programs, severe treatment of the body, a busy church schedule, saturating ourselves with Christian service, or insulating ourselves from the world with Christian fellowship—is what we need to swallow up the death of our flesh here and now.

Hope anchored in the present power of the Gospel answers our yearning for liberation from the present power of indwelling sin. The Promiser will come, as the Father wills to reveal Him through the Gospel, and produce every fruit that pleases God in the here and now, as well as the life to come. *Christ* is our life! He is enough! He is all sufficient! God delights to overwhelmingly, abundantly supply Christ, the hope of glory, our inherited life every day, all day.

CHAPTER 8

“THE ABOVE” VERSUS “UPON THE EARTH”

The Spirit of God through Paul pointed out the pathway to rescue for these beleaguered believers from the plunderers who threatened to strip away their enjoyment of their inheritance in Christ. The hope of the Gospel—“Jesus alone”—has been contrasted to the “Jesus plus” of the errant teachers. In chapter 1 Christ is everything. He is the supreme originator and supplier of the universe and the church for which He died to save. In chapter 2 Paul has shown the Christian’s relationship to Christ as their Substitute. Because the Christian has died with Christ, he is dead to the elementary principles of this world. The law guarded God’s people until faith came through Christ. Once life in Christ has come, the old preparatory means are as useless as the chrysalis shell from which butterfly emerged. We have seen how transformation occurs, not by human efforts but by faith in Christ’s working. The almighty power of Jesus Christ homed in on in this epistle is His appearing with us in glory. Christ’s future Second Coming contains within it a present principle: the revealing of Christ to us from the “heavens” of the pages of the Word of God.

In these pivotal verses of chapter 3, the grace of God is embodied in a revelation of Jesus Christ in which we appear with Him in glory. Grace is what Christ does for undeserving sinners. Grace, not our performance (as the false teachers promoted), is the foundation for all that which follows: putting off the sins of the flesh and putting on Christ, the true glory of every virtue and labor of the Christian. Paul could sniff out *any* line of reasoning that had at its core earthly wisdom because Christ Jesus as preeminent Lord is absent as its center. If Jesus Christ is the not the center of preeminence of how a Christian changes to become as he is, it is inevitably doomed to failure.

We now turn to the important question, “Yes, but how?” How do we appropriate the promises of the glory and power of Christ that puts to death the works of the flesh? What practically are we called to do in order to be adorned with the beauty of the Gospel? The practical how-to for us today is contained in Colossians 3:1-2:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

More often than not Christians do not get this. I missed it for years. These verses so often go right over our heads because we import a meaning to it that is foreign to the context of the letter. May we as the Christ’s bride recover the excellency of God’s wisdom presented here for us.

God is exceedingly better than our theology of Him. Thank God for that! As finite sinful beings, our theology is always playing catch-up to the Infinite. Yet our understanding of God improves because we have a willing and patient Teacher. Many precious saints have inadvertently attributed spiritual growth to other things, unconscious that their love for and attentiveness to the Gospel was what the Lord used

to bring the flesh to death and His inheritance to light. None of us knows and understands God perfectly in this life. We all see through a glass darkly. But we do want to avoid the snares that Paul labored to expose of what has no value against the indulgence of the flesh. A 21st Christian may clearly avoid eating and drinking, Sabbaths, and Jewish festivals today, but how recognizable are the same outworkings in our day? Fawn Parish in her insightful article “It’s All About You, Jesus”, recognized our need to focus on Jesus Christ alone as Colossians warned:

We have pastoral unity advocates, revivalists, cultural redemption proponents, Christian world-view futurists, family values lobbyists, warfare specialists, prayer specialists, city-taking strategists, prophecy specialists, doctrinal purity specialists- But we have increasingly fewer people concentrating solely on studying the personality and character of Jesus, the Light.⁶

This how-to section on seeking the things that are above has a more restrictive sense in the context of the letter. As we will see, it is concentrated on the personality and character of Jesus, the Light. Granted, the phrases “things above” on the surface has a broad meaning. We can fill in the blank for “the things that are above” to mean the kingdom of God, heaven, treasures in heaven, spiritual gifts, godly character, Jesus, Jesus’ Second Coming, and so on. What defines “the things above” are the two chapters which precede them. The original setting beautifully opens up our hearts to receive all the fullness of Christ our inheritance.

Seeking the Above Is Not Pursuing Grace’s Outworkings

In order to understand what something means, sometimes it helps to first identify what it *doesn’t* mean. What Paul admonishes the Colossians to “seek the things that are above” that does not mean seeking victory over sin or godly character. It is true that the Bible does encourage us to seek these. After all, Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy:

So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. (2Tim 2:22)

When Paul teaches to “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth”, the “things that are on the earth” are not the fleeting, fallen pleasures of the earth. The Colossian believers were already seeking for victory over sin and godly character; the problem was they were looking away from the hope of the Gospel to obtain them. It is quite easy to import general truths of the Bible into texts that have a more restrictive meaning. While this often can be helpful, especially interpreting less clear passages with more clear ones, at other times it can be counterproductive. In importing foreign texts into these verses, the originally intended meaning of the native words can become blurry or even lost from view. I have heard many times “the things that are on the earth” preached to mean the things that are in the world:

⁶ Fawn Parish, *It’s All About You Jesus* (retrieved from <http://www.reignbridge.com/?page=iaayj> on February 15, 2011)

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world— the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. (1Jn 2:15-16)

Again, it is of a general truth that Christians should not seek the world and all its fleeting, fallen pleasures, like lust and pride. But here is one instance we need to take earnest care with the context of Colossians. Consider the audience to whom this is written and the root problem they were having. Remember that the false teachers were not the real problem. They were the occasion for the disturbance but not the source of the issue. The root problem was discouragement, particularly a discouragement rooted in their failure to please God. They experienced the power of the Gospel when they first received the grace of God and faith in Christ; then love towards the saints abounded. They experienced fruitfulness in the life of Jesus. But somewhere along the way, they discovered the frustrating effects of the presence of indwelling sin. This became a source of discouragement to these precious saints who had a new heart devoted to pleasing the Lord. They had the Gospel and saw that it worked in the past, but maybe the Gospel wasn't enough for their current troubles with the flesh. So these persuasive sounding arguments promising subjugation of the flesh gained a foothold in their minds. So seeking the things above does not mean an intentional effort to avoid the things below, such as lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Seeking the above in a restricted sense in our letter also does not mean the kingdom of God. We are likely familiar with Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." The Colossians *were seeking* the kingdom of God, in its already present spiritual sense which Paul defined as "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). However, the subtle problem was that they were tempted to supplement the Gospel with other methods to achieve that end. In its context, therefore, Paul has a much narrower idea for "the things above". His focus is directed towards the *means* for achieving the kingdom of God, the way in which we arrive at conformity to Christ in daily life. So "the things above" in this instance refers to the means to the kingdom of God, namely the Gospel message itself, a faith that sees God in Christ having done all. The *means* of grace are in view and not the *outworkings* of grace, such as victory over sin and Christlikeness.

Pinpointing the Things that are on Earth

Paul has been building up a logical argument all through chapter 2. It is in the line upon line, precept upon precept development of this case we can clearly identify what he means by the "things that are on earth". Then we can determine what Paul means by its opposite, "the things that are above". The Greek here is simply an article "the" combined with the word *ano* for "above", so literally it simply reads "the above". There is no Greek word explicitly for "things" in there. The insertion of "things" into our English translation almost always gives an accurate sense of the original. However, I would argue that here "things" is not the best translation. "Things" has a hazy notion of stuff or a bunch of items. Because our mind has that connotation for the word "things" it makes its use here a little more challenging to grasp the train of thought. I personally like the literal phrase "the above" and let the

Spirit translate its sense to my heart as it is introduced in its context. It's fine to use "the things that are above" as long as our hearts can make the translation of what is intended, which is not really "things" but more along the lines of "ways" or "means". From this point on, I will use the term "the above" in order to direct the heart more clearly as the original recipients of this letter would have understood it.

As Paul contrasts what he preaches and teaches—Christ—with what they preach and teach, we see a number of references to the earth and the world. These are "the below". His opening argument pits teaching Christ against philosophical teachings and traditions according to principles of the world:

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, *according to the elemental spirits of the world*, and not according to Christ. (Col 2:8)

The substance behind these teachings was not Christ but the "elemental spirits of the world". The New King James Version translates "elemental spirits" as "basic principles". The original word *stoicheon* comes from a verb meaning to put things in a row or to arrange in order. Our alphabet illustrates this word well. We might say that these teachings are the ABCs of the world.

Paul reiterates this same idea as his argument builds, saying in 2:20:

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits [*stoicheon*] of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—"Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (Col 2:20-21)

Christ died to regulations just as He died to the Law (Rom 7:4). The lifeblood of rules and regulations, Paul asserts, is the elemental or basic principles of the world. Because Christ has died to these for justification, sanctification and glorification, we by nature of our union with Him are likewise dead to them. Because we are dead with Christ, the logical conclusion of that is the ABCs of "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" have no value at all in living the Christian life. The death of Christ to sin and all its forms and effects is 100% sufficient to accomplish what any commandment of men could never accomplish. The ABCs are important in that they prepare us to read, but once the mastery of the alphabet is learned, we move on to the higher purpose for which they were intended.

John the Baptist recognized the difference between the source of words being of heaven or of earth. John came as the forerunner, the one who prepares. As the burning and shining lamp was finishing its predetermined course, the Baptizer spoke up:

He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. (John 3:31)

John spoke in an earthly way. He baptized in an earthly way, that is, as a preparatory way much as the alphabet prepares one to read and write. John baptized with water (earthly) in order to prepare for the Son of God's baptism in the Holy Spirit (heavenly). The former introduces the latter, which is permanent and established by Christ.

The Shadow Vanishes When Christ Has Come

This same thought of “from above” as final and permanent contrasted with “of the earth” as preparatory and obsolete is captured as part of Paul’s argument:

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. (Col 2:16-17)

The word for “substance” literally is “body”, as in a human body. This metaphor contrasts a body with the shadow it casts. This metaphor is helpful in establishing the contrast of the above, the body, with “the things of the earth”, the shadow. The Jews had all kinds of dietary laws established in the Old Testament, specifying clean and unclean animals. We see in the New Testament how Peter envisioned a great sheet filled with these animals that taught through Christ’s finished work that all things were clean (Acts 11). They were a shadow in that it faintly pointed us to Jesus Christ. Once Christ has come, the shadow is no longer needed, for the body is here. Likewise the Sabbath as a day dedicated from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday with all its prescribed rules and regulations under Mosaic Law has been swallowed up in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is now our Sabbath, not for a 24-hour period once a week, but an everlasting Sabbath we enjoy moment by moment.

The point here is that the shadows are what Paul means by the things of the earth referred to in chapter 3. They are all the ABCs and shadows of that which was to come and replace them, namely, Christ Himself. They were preparatory and transitional, not permanent. If we seek the below—the shadows of preparatory pictures for Christ Himself—and set our mind on them, we have been shaken and shifted off the hope of the Gospel, which is Christ who has come. This is not to say that pictures have no value to us today. If rightly used, they can aid us in laying hold of the spiritual reality that it represents in Jesus. But the danger Paul is warning us about is this. By throwing our hope and affections into the below, the earthly, the preparatory, the ABCs, we subtly lose out on the riches of our inheritance in Christ that comes through simple faith in Him.

The Above: Teaching the Gospel of Christ

So we get a better idea what Paul means by the above by seeing how he set them in contrast with “the below”—that list of philosophies, Jewish festivals, etc. of chapter 2.

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. (Col 1:28)

The “we” in “Him we proclaim” is emphatic in Greek. Paul is raising his voice a bit, declaring, “Him WE proclaim”. It implies a “THEY”. There is a designed contrast between what Paul was preaching and what the other false teachers were preaching in Colosse. Paul’s message—the Gospel, Christ and Him crucified—then is “the above”. It is the single nail the apostle has been hammering throughout this letter and others of *faith* in Christ Jesus the Lord.

Let’s review the “AS...SO” passages, our how-to verses, of how go from receiving Christ to walking in Him—living the Christian life victorious over sin, adorned in Christ’s character, and actively representing Him in every relationship in the home, in the church, and in the world. “The above” does not veer off

one of the key verse: “As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him”. How did we receive Christ at the beginning? It was through the *revelation* of Christ from His Word shining into our hearts (2Cor 3:18-4:6)! Our walking in Christ, Paul points out, is after the same manner as we received Christ at the start. Our Christian life, as it is depicted here, is comprised of a continuous series of revelations of the Lord Jesus from God’s Word. How do I know that I am receiving Christ? Chapter 3 answers it. Chapter 3 is the test that demonstrates I am embracing by faith the Gospel message of chapters 1 and 2. The evidence of faith that continually is receiving Christ is a life that is continually being revealed with Him in glory. It is a life that shows that He is being revealed to me in a transforming way—that is, Life is swallowing up death. Receiving Christ means a conforming life to Christ.

Life and Light Revealed

Now we want to see the relationship between revelation—receiving Christ—and life—walking in Him. This is important to understand the principle so we can maximize our participation in the means of grace that God has provided. When Paul admonishes us to seek the above, there is an organic connection between the revealing of Christ and a growth into His likeness. What God has joined together, let not man separate. A seeking of the above must involve a seeking of light, an open revelation of Christ Jesus the Lord to our hearts. How does seeking the above, a seeking a revelation of Christ through the God-appointed means transform our life?

Light is a metaphor for glory. For example, the light of the sun is its glory; it is that which reveals the grandeur of the sun to us. In the Christian life, our Father in heaven greatly longs that we lay hold of the inheritance we already possess in Jesus. Our inheritance is amazingly an inheritance of Christ’s glory.

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

In the Bible there is a close bond between light and life. From the very beginning the voice of God proclaimed, “Let there be light” and life quickly followed after. Light and life in the plant world abundantly testify to this truth in our world today. The light of the sun is converted into the life of the plant through a process called photosynthesis. The leaf of the plant is specially designed to receive solar energy and convert that into consumable food. The light becomes the energy, or might, for the plant. Take away the light and the plant dies. For green-leafed plants the light is its life.

The Apostle Paul picked up on the parallel between creation and the new creation in the heart of man:

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2Cor 4:6)

The knowledge of the glory of God is light. When Jesus Christ steps down from His throne in heaven to come back to Earth, that coming will be an open revelation to mankind. He will again be the Light of the world, not unseen any longer. Every eye will see His full radiance, even those who pierced Him. The revelation of Christ (i.e. light) is directly associated with life. So when Christ, who is our life appears, that hidden life will flourish right alongside, even more so than our lush green earth bathed in the

sunshine. This is an expansion of John 1:4, which says, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” Here life and light are used interchangeably.

John’s Gospel instructs us how this light, a revelation of the hidden life of God, was a display of His glory.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

The Lord Jesus Himself affirmed this life principle of seeing Him and receiving life by receiving Him by faith:

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:40)

The Greek language has a dozen words for our word “look” or “see”; each has subtle nuances that flavor the kind of seeing that is intended. The original word for “looks on” is *theoreo* (THAY-oh-ray-oh), which is a careful scrutinizing or inspecting. It is the kind of critical inspection that the general of the army would have of its soldiers in the parade as opposed to the casual observation of the crowd. Like the disciples who strained their eyes to catch the last glimpses of the Lord Jesus as He wafted upwards towards heaven, it is the Father’s will that we would look to Christ with such captivated interest. It is this kind of mesmerizing, no longer with eyes of flesh but the eyes of the heart, that is connected with eternal life.

Jesus, our Immanuel—God with us—had the huge advantage that no other prophet or representative of God in the Old Testament could ever do: show us the pure, unobstructed glory of God.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature (Heb 1:1-2a, 3).

John the apostle testified, “We have seen his glory.” What effects did that observation have? “And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” This is a big theme in the Bible where life and light are closely connected. The *life* of Christ (grace upon grace) is conveyed to us through the *light* of Christ, the revelation of Him in that the eternal Word became flesh. At Christ’s coming, the resurrection of the saints is the triumph of life over death. The perishable will at long last give way to imperishable, dishonor to glory, and weakness to power. All the death that entered into the world through one man will exit out of the world through one Man, Jesus Christ. What Paul is laboring in this letter to show us is that like it will be at the consummation of all things, so too we will have it in foretaste in this life by faith. All that is earthly in us can potentially experience partial resurrection. We should expect this.

As we seek the above, the glory of Jesus as revealed in Scripture through the Spirit, we appropriate from His fullness, a fullness that is grace upon grace. Seeking the above is our hope in the Gospel to be fruitful in all the examples and illustrations Paul provides in the last chapters of this letter. We as believers do have a part to play, and that part emphasized here in Colossians is to get into the “Sunshine”. We now turn our attention to some of those practical ways God has for us to receive the

light of Christ to dissolve discouragement and grow up into the full stature of Him who bought us with His own blood.

CHAPTER 9

PRACTICAL WAYS TO SEEK THE ABOVE

When Paul by the Spirit says to seek the above or to mind the above, that boils down to the content of his teaching regarding the Gospel of Christ. The sound of alarm started in chapter 1 of not being moved off the hope of the Gospel. “The below” or the things that are on earth are those teachings that went backwards from Christ to the elementary, basic, preparatory principles of law keeping and rule following. These, he argues at the end of chapter 2, have no value against the indulgence of the flesh. He acknowledges that they had an *appearance* of wisdom, but in the final analysis they were not the spiritual wisdom that rescued from the flesh. To seek the above and to set our minds on the above are to engage our close attention to the teaching about Christ, the Gospel! Our part is to keep the roots of our faith in the soil of the preeminent Lord Jesus Christ. The way we do this is by keeping our attention focused on what Christ has done for us, not on what we must do for God. The Gospel is so counterintuitive; it cuts across the grain of our natural thought process. Yet when Christ occupies the landscape of our mind, not our performance, we actually bear the luscious fruit of the Gospel in daily life.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek [the above], where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on [the above], not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Col 3:1-3)

Practically, then, what are “the above” we are to seek and to set our minds on? Paul does not leave us in the dark about it. Thankfully he has illustrated his point in several places in the letter. If our exposition of Scripture has been sound up to this point, then we can say that what Paul intends to mean “the above” are the *means* of grace. The primary means underscored to his readers is in preaching and teaching. Let’s look again at the opening verses of Colossians, paying close attention to “heard”, “understood”, and “learned”:

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. *Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel*, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing—as it also does among you, *since the day you heard it and understood* the grace of God in truth, *just as you learned it* from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant (Col 1:3-7).

We see that Paul is making the connection between fruit bearing and hearing and understanding the presentation of the Gospel. Paul repeats preaching and teaching as a means of grace later on in the chapter:

...Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. (Col 1:27-28)

Do you want to know what Paul taught? He taught Christ! You see it here and in every other one of his letters and in the records in Acts. The main verb of verse 28 is “proclaim”. “Warning” and “teaching” are present participles that give further clarity to the main verb. How did Paul bring about warnings? They were centered upon the Lord Jesus Christ. How did Paul approach teachings? These too were rooted and grounded in the Person and finished work of Jesus Christ.

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you *except Jesus Christ and him crucified*. (1Cor 2:1-2)

This is one of the ways we are to seek the above. We have the basic contents of what Paul’s teaching consists of, for Luke graciously provided a record of a Gospel sermon he delivered. Paul masterfully leads his Jewish and Gentile listeners of the synagogue, who were familiar with the Old Testament, along a Spirit-inspired tour through the sacred stories. His God-centered history lesson of Israel climaxes upon King David, how God raised up a king. He then makes the connection with John the Baptist’s testifying that the Christ—David’s promised Son—had come. Paul confirms this with a blend of historical facts about Jesus’ death and resurrection supported with proofs from the writers of the Old Testament. The main point of his preaching ends:

Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:38-39)

This is the heart of the Gospel. This is the chain shattering, sin emancipating message that when heard and understood brings forth a life of faith and love. Within the letter itself, Paul has also brought to the forefront the implications for Christians of the historical facts of Jesus Christ’s death, burial, resurrection and ascension. Chapter 2 especially hones in on a stupendous catalog of the grace of God (what He has done)—“the above” on which we may profitably are to seek and to mind.

- You have been filled in Him (verse 10)
- You were circumcised in Him (verse 11)
- You were buried with Him in baptism (verse 12)
- You were raised with Him (verse 12)
- God made you alive together with Him (verse 13)
- God forgave you all your trespasses (verse 13)
- Your death with Christ freed you from rules and regulations (verse 20)

What Paul proclaimed by warning and teaching have been graciously provided to us by God in our Bible. Setting our minds on the things above means, then, to welcome and entertain the revelation of Christ in Gospel expositing from Scripture in our minds.

Seeing Beyond the Earthly Instrument

We now can backtrack into the earlier parts of the epistle and understand why Paul laid such an importance on teaching.

Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the *gospel...just as you learned it from Epaphras* our beloved fellow servant. (Col 1:5, 7)

Paul attributes the Colossians early successes in faith in Christ and love towards all to their embracing the teaching they received from Epaphras. These verses leave no doubt what that teaching was all about. It was the Gospel of the pure grace of God, how God so loved the world that He gave His only Son what whosoever believes would not perish but have eternal life. This Good News, Paul asserts as the crux of progressive sanctification, is what we are to give our attention to and thoughts and affections to. Paul again returns to drawing our attention to the means of grace that teaching is.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, *just as you were taught*, abounding in thanksgiving. (Col 2:6-7)

Colossians deals with spiritual realities. Paul sees beyond the earthly instrument—Epaphras—to the God who does all the real work behind it. He never once thanks Epaphras for what he did, but gives all glory and praise to God for what He accomplished. The Colossians received Christ Jesus the Lord directly in connection with the teaching they had received from Epaphras. When these believers sought the above and set their mind on the above—the word of God’s grace in Christ, God opened their hearts to receive Christ! As Paul, then, tries to connect their initial experiences in grace with their ongoing experiences in grace, he redirects them back to the teaching of Christ in the Gospel. As we have received Christ, so walk in Him. Our spiritual walk is maintained by a steady, continued gaze at Jesus in the Gospel. Fruitfulness begins in grace and continues in grace.

Seeking the Above: Praying

Through preaching or teaching, the promises of eternal life in Christ Jesus are proclaimed, believed upon and received, bearing the fruit of eternal life. There is yet another means of grace that God has given to receive Christ so that we might walk in Him. A second practical example of how we are encouraged to seek the above is through *prayer*. See how often Paul makes mention of prayer in this letter in connection with receiving Christ. As we are increasingly conformed to Christ, we will be transformed into the likeness of Him as an intercessor. Really it is the preeminent Lord Jesus praying in and through us. The book of Hebrews gives the full mention of what the Lord Jesus looks like in His role to ever live and intercede for His people. In Colossians we see illustrations of Christ’s intercessory ministry through His people. Paul prayed in such a way that he really believed that by praying, the recipients of his prayers (the Colossians) would actually be changed as a result. Although there are many ways people pray, we want to see the quality of praying that effects the revealing of Christ in and through the lives of His people.

A Large White Sheet or a Small Black Dot?

Effectual praying starts with thankfulness. The corruptness of sin has an incredible bent of distorting our perception, especially how we view other people. A Christian teacher once impacted me with this illustration that drives home the point:

I remember hearing a story of a teacher who spread a large white sheet of paper with a small black dot in one corner, in front of his class of students once. He then asked the students what they saw. All of them said that they saw a small black dot in one corner. No one said that they saw the large white sheet. That is how human nature is - blind to the good that there is in others. We only see their black dots.⁷

One evidence that we are being conformed by the Gospel is that we are increasingly seeing and rejoicing in the “white sheet” of God’s grace in others and less critical and condemning of the “black spot” of their unfinished areas of sanctification. Thanking God has a way of diverting our attention from the blemishes that exist to the amazing work of God that generates the faith and the love. It is not turning a blind eye toward sin, but first turning an open eye to the Lord Jesus’ amazing grace evidencing itself. Thankfulness is not something we are to grit our teeth and try harder at. Rather it is a beautiful promise that if we seek the above as Paul did, seeking and loving the Lord Jesus, our lives will supernaturally be transformed into a thankful intercessor as Paul was. There was a time in my life years ago before this message of Colossians became real to my heart that I was convicted that I was not praying night and day for others like Paul did. I tried to imitate Paul by trying to pray more, and it seemed to work for a little while. But like all old covenant obedience, like the shining face of Moses that faded, once I turned my attention off that imitation, it too faded away. Thank God that now my focus is on Jesus my prayer life is automatic, delighting in the promptings of the Spirit through the day.

Before we can pray effectively to see the channels of Gospel blessing opened up on our brothers and sisters, God must give us His eyes to see them as He does in Christ. Paul’s spiritual eyes locked upon the activity of grace in believers’ lives.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints (Col 1:3-4).

If Paul observed faith in Jesus and love for the saints, he was overwhelmed with thankfulness to God. Even in the problem-riddled Corinthian church, this apostle had his eye first upon God’s activity:

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 1:4).

Later on in the epistle to the Colossians, Paul stresses this heart attitude we should possess as those who have been qualified by the Father to be partakers of the inheritance in the Light:

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. (Col 3:15)

⁷ Poonen, Zac. The Full Gospel. (Retrieved from http://www.cfcindia.com/web/mainpages/book_window.php?book=the_full_gospel on March 14, 2001)

A tuning fork is an instrument that is used to align a musical instrument when it gets out of tune. The Gospel is God's great tuning fork to tune our hearts to thankfulness. A heart that has been tuned by this grace is in the right frame to intercede in effectual ways for others to grow up into the full stature of Jesus Christ. Having thankfulness as a loving attitude of the heart, let's see how we can be seeking the above through prayer.

Willingness to Make Jesus Christ Preeminent

Paul's opening petition centers upon the will of God. He prays that God would open their understanding to His will.

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Col 1:9-10)

Though this is a flowery sentence, the basic thoughts are two-fold. First, Paul prays that these believers might be filled with the knowledge of God's will. The second thought flows out of the first. Knowing God's will leads to a fruitful, outward life and knowing God better. Earlier when considering the mega-theme of God's willingness, we defined God's will not in a broad sense but a narrow sense in light of this particular letter. What Paul is praying for the Colossians' eyes to be opened in is God's will, that is, His willingness to make Jesus Christ preeminent for every need. There is no need to look elsewhere outside of His Son. Christ as the hope of the Gospel need not be dimmed in the slightest.

Paul's prayer here in the first chapter parallels the keynote verse of the whole book: "Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." Paul prayed that they might walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully please to Him. In chapter 2, he is teaching how this fruitfulness is to be achieved. In his instruction, he is laying emphasis upon the actual reception of Christ Jesus the Lord. In chapter 1 Paul prays that the believers would know God's will; in chapter 2 he instructs what God's will is. Paul's prayer emphasizes an opening up of their understanding to know that God delights to do the same: make Jesus Christ readily accessible to be received by faith.

Paul actually expected God to answer this oft repeated prayer. He expected that lives would actually be different. Though he was bound in prison, the God of all was not, for He is a God who answers prayer. As we embrace the message of Colossians as Paul embraced it, we will be increasingly conformed to a prayer life like his by the power of the Spirit.

Perfect Confidence in the Gospel

A second prayer laid out in the letter is closely related to the knowledge of God's will but from a slightly different angle.

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you . . . to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col 2:1-3)

Referring again to the treatment of it in Chapter 3, it is in the context of an intense contest of spiritual intercession. In addition to Paul's yearning for these discouraged saints to be encouraged, he trusted in God to take them forward into "all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ". A "mystery" when Paul wrote had a slightly different idea than it does today. Today we think of a mystery as something yet unsolved. In the Greek language in which Paul wrote, mystery is something that had once been secret and now was revealed and known. So that which was once hidden was that Jesus Christ, the God of glory, would dwell in Jews and Gentiles. The burden here is that Paul longed that the Colossians would see the riches of the wisdom in the Gospel as opposed to the counterfeit wisdom of the false teachers. The good news announcements (Gospel) of Jesus Christ—He is Savior, Redeemer, Lord, Creator, ad infinitum—contain every possible treasure connected with a God-pleasing walk and life.

As discussed earlier, there is a battle over the hope of the Gospel. There are invisible principalities and powers at work through the sons of disobedience (i.e. the false teachers) to get them to doubt that the Gospel *alone* saves and sanctifies. The opposite of doubt is "full assurance", which means perfect confidence or freedom from doubt. So not only did Paul pray for open eyes to the Father's willingness to make Jesus all in all, but also that they would abound in a perfect confidence that every real treasure is in the Lord Jesus. With an unflinching confidence like that, the counterfeit treasures offered on the basis of earthly wisdom lose all appeal.

Standing Mature in the Will of God

The final illustration we will look at for prayer as an ordained means of grace of seeking the above is Epaphras, the man God used to plant the church of Colosse. Our first glimpse of Epaphras is in chapter 1, where he is revealed as a faithful minister of Christ. In what respect is he a faithful minister? Paul clues us in that it is regards to his prayer ministry:

...Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit. For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you... (Col 1:7-9, NKJV)

The "we also" gives this ministry a context of praying. The "we" in the Greek is emphatic; the "also" compares their ministry after the same manner as Epaphras. Epaphras was a minister of intercession. As he was a faithful minister of Christ on their behalf, so too was Paul on their behalf as he ceased not to pray for them. In the final chapter of Colossians we see explicitly Epaphras in action as an intercessor and what those petitions were about.

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. (Col 4:12-13)

I again turn to Kenneth Wuest's translation to capture the essence of the Greek:

There greets you Epaphras, the one who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Christ Jesus, always wrestling on your behalf in his prayers, to the effect that you may stand fast, spiritually mature ones, and those who have been brought to the full assurance in everything willed by God.

The content of Epaphras' petitions that they would stand mature in all the will of God. This maturity (sometimes translated "perfection") does not refer to their justification—God's legal declaration of their right standing with God by virtue of their union with their Substitute, Jesus Christ. God had already qualified them to share in the inheritance of the saints in light (1:13) by canceling the record of debt that stood against them with its legal demands (2:14). A believer has the legal blameless standing of Jesus Christ that cannot be improved upon or perfected; it is the perfect righteousness of the Lamb that has been imputed or deposited into his spiritual bank account. What could be improved upon, however, was their actual practice of the Gospel, what we call sanctification. What could be bettered was their appropriation of their inheritance in Christ that was already theirs.

The focal point of this faithful minister of Christ was a full assurance of all the will of God, or everything willed by God. As we have amply observed, God's will expressed in Colossians is that everything the Christian needs is met in Jesus Christ. In the context of seeking the above, we have illustrated for us the passionate pursuit on the behalf of others to have their spiritual eyes opened to God's willingness to make Christ preeminent. As our minds are ablaze with the glorious truths of all Christ has done on our behalf and all Christ is as all the fullness of the Godhead bodily to us, we will be increasingly perfected in our behavior and practice. Christ the hope of glory is revealed as our all in all, manifesting His life through our mortal bodies. Prayer is another key for furthering others' progress and our own into the depths of the riches of the Gospel. As we embrace the message of Colossians, like Paul and Epaphras did, we will be automatically conformed to Christ's image as intercessor, or rather, Christ praying through us as His faithful ministers.

Seeking the Above: Singing

Besides absorbing our minds with teachings from God's Word about Christ and praying for spiritually open eyes, Paul also makes mention of the role that singing has in engaging our affections on the above.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col 3:16)

The wisdom of God here is an encouragement not to neglect the powerful effect upon our souls that Christ-centered psalms, hymns and spiritual songs can have. Notice that the main verb is "dwell", so "singing" is a participle that is a supporting actor to that. So in addition to "teaching" and "admonishing", singing is another way of letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly. When properly heard and understood by faith, the grace of God in singing out of a thankful heart to God can be life transforming like preaching or praying. This is not to say that songs should take up the front seat of our Christian lives, but should be a great supplement to hold fast to the Head—Jesus.

I have noticed songs in different worship gatherings that focus more on what we are to do for God than on what Christ has done for us. I am grateful to be in a church that takes very seriously the content of Sunday celebration to highlight the excellencies of Jesus Christ's person and finished work. I have observed the noticeable effects of Christ-centered music upon my soul. Having God's perspective of the role that corporate singing has upon our growth in Christ should impact us, not only in our timeliness to

participate, but in our eagerness, joyful adoration, and thanksgiving during that time that enables us to walk in Christ. The sister epistle to Colossians, the book of Ephesians, puts this same principle in a slightly different light:

...but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart (Eph 5:18-19).

Whereas Colossians emphasizes singing as an expression of the word of Christ dwelling in us richly, Ephesians lays stress on it as an outworking of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Together they form the inseparable union of Word and Spirit. The Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus. As we give place to singing heartfelt psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, the Spirit is actually at work to set our minds on the above—the free and rich pronouncements of what Christ has done for us. As we see Jesus as He is revealed by the Spirit-glorifying Word of God, we are being transformed into the same image of our Lord (2 Cor 3:18).

Singing has a unique way of expressing and repeating the word of Christ to our souls. Who can calculate the inestimable good that has come from such hymns to the church, such as John Newton's *Amazing Grace*?

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found
Was blind but now I see

Another hymn that resonates with the Gospel notes along the lines of “[God] having forgiven us all our trespasses” (2:13) illustrates setting our minds on the above:

Jesus paid it all
All to Him I owe
Sin had left a crimson stain
He washed me white as snow

If we allow the truth of God's word on this topic, it would really transform our private and corporate worship. Instead of being tempted to be late on a Sunday morning when the church gathers to worship the risen Lord, fresh expectation to being transformed should change us. Legalism would have us conform to an external time constraint to be on time to start singing. Grace, on the other hand, recognizes God's means of grace in a time of corporate worship as a way of setting my mind on the above. The wonderful expectation of such a heart oriented towards Christ is a receiving of Him through the Father and Spirit showing Him to us.

I heard an illustration recently about glorifying God that fits well to the corporate means of grace during singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. How is a water fountain glorified? Can a water fountain be glorified? Yes, by coming and drinking. The glory of the fountain is that it fulfills the purpose for which it was created. God originally created man in His image to be receivers. Sin turned everything upside

down and makes man think he is the giver, not the receiver. God wills that we be completely satisfied by His Son. "As you have freely received, freely give." We are not first givers but receivers. Paul does a lot of theological heavy lifting through two chapters to get us to see God's scrapbook of everything He did for us in Christ. Before we are told to do even one thing, we are abundantly shown everything Christ did for us. And during the times of praise and worship, as faith lays hold upon the Good News of the grace of Christ, we become recipients of a willing Father to reveal His Son to us that sets free from the power of indwelling sin and puts on the garments of grace. There is no shame in coming to a corporate gathering to worship our risen Lord to receive. Like the water fountain, we glorify Him by receiving. Thank God that He provides this as a means of grace for us to receive Jesus Christ by faith. "As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him."

CHAPTER 10

OUR SHARE OF THE INHERITANCE OF THE SAINTS IN THE LIGHT

Before closing on these thoughts in the book of Colossians, I'd like to summarize everything by the theme of the Christian's inheritance. When someone receives Christ, he receives all of Christ. The Lord Jesus is not divvied out like pieces of a pie. Colossians 2 testifies that you are in Him, having received the fullness of Him. Romans 8:32 declares, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" The apostle John echoes the same: "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:11). Everything we have is in the Son, and every Christian who has been united to Him has all of the inheritance. But it begs the question, "If we all have all of Christ, why does it seem some have to have more of Christ?" It doesn't take long to look around and assess that all Christians do not possess Christ to the same degree.

In this letter, Paul has some strategic allusions to the Old Testament. He uses redemptive history, that is, Israel's history that tells a spiritual story pointing to Christ's redeeming work, to illustrate their true, spiritual meaning for the New Testament people of God. In the book of Acts, Paul's sermon encapsulates Israel's history in Exodus and Judges:

The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. . . . And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. (Acts 13:17, 19)

Colossians is an explanation book. All throughout, Paul has interpreted the historical facts of Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and ascension into their redemptive applications to Christians. Because Jesus died, we died with Him, liberating us from the commandments of men (Col 2:20-21). Paul has also taken the historical facts of Israel's history and showed the spiritual implications for the new covenant church. For example, the themes of Exodus and Joshua are condensed into these two verses:

...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col 1:12-14)

God delivering us from the domain of darkness is the spiritual reality of God leading the children of Israel out of Egypt with an uplifted arm. That's Exodus summarized and explained in new covenant light. The Father has also qualified us to share in the inheritance (literally "lot") of the saints in the Light. This echoes the big thoughts of the book of Joshua, where 6 chapters are devoted to the use of the lot to distribute the inheritance of Canaan land to the Israelites. Paul sees physical Canaan as the shadow of the reality of Jesus Christ, the true Canaan, our inheritance in the Light. The Old Testament pictures of Christ in type and shadow are swallowed up in Jesus. So looking backwards into Israel's history with Christ-goggles on, Paul saw what was happening in Joshua and Judges as a foretaste of the saints'

inheritance in the true and lasting inheritance—Christ Himself. “For in [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him” (Col 2:9-10). This is another way of saying our share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. In the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua, the land of Canaan foreshadowed the fullness of the inheritance fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full... (Deut 6:10-11).

The Promised Land is vividly described as a completed land—finished cities and houses ready to dwell in, finished cisterns ready to drink from, and finished vineyards and groves ready to eat from. Paul says that Christ now is the fullness for the Christian, all based upon His finished work on the cross. We can give thanks to the Father, the LORD our God, who has brought us into the “land”—the kingdom of the Son of His love!

For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. (Deut 8:7-10)

The physical pictures the spiritual. The abundance of water to satisfy the thirst of God’s people finds ultimate fulfillment in Christ who satisfies His people with living waters, the Holy Spirit. The abundance of food also finds its final reality in Christ, who is the living bread, the true food upon which His people are made strong. The message of Colossians is that we have a Christ in whom we will lack nothing. Everything we need is in Jesus Christ. We can give thanks to our God and Father, who has delivered us from the domain of darkness and brought us into the “good land”—the kingdom of the Son of His love! We have been filled in Him (Col 2:10).

The book of Joshua also draws attention to the inheritance of the Levites. Unlike the rest of the tribes, they were not to inherit any of the good land. Rather, their inheritance was the Lord Himself. So in the Old Testament, the inheritances of the Levites and the rest of the tribes were separate. In the new and better covenant, they are united in Christ! Whereas the inheritance of the tribes of Israel pictured inheriting the fullness, the inheritance of the Levites pictured the quality and reality of that fullness, which was God Himself. Paul here by the Spirit masterfully intertwines them both. The inheritance of the Christian is fantastic beyond all imagination: the fullness of the Godhead bodily! Chapters 3 and 4 take us up on Mount Pisgah to take a panoramic view of our inheritance—the defeat of our real enemies (sin and the flesh) and enjoying of the kingdom of God: righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17). The richness of our “land of milk and honey” is the life of Christ—compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and love. The root of discouragement revolved around how to possess our promised inheritance. Faith possesses our inheritance in Christ to the glory of God.

The Father also delivered us from the domain of darkness. Here we have an allusion to the Passover deliverance of the Israelites from the tyranny of their Egyptian captors. The redemption, the purchase price, was illustrated by the Passover Lamb. The Father transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son. Here we see Joshua again, planting us in the Promised Land, foreshadowing Christ, who is the life of milk and honey. So Paul in a brief way summarizes the Exodus and Joshua as no longer shadow but the glorious realities of the Gospel.

The “put to death” in Colossians 3:5 bears a strong resemblance to the book of Joshua as well. In the Old Testament the putting to death referred to God’s judicial prerogatives against the wicked, unrepentant inhabitants of Canaan. Like the Exodus and inheriting of Canaan were shadows of the coming good things in Christ, so too here. What transpired with the death of the Canaanites in Joshua and Judges foreshadowed the coming good things of the death of the sins of the flesh—Israel’s true enemy. Another theme in Judges is that though the armies of Israel went out to battle, the LORD is the One who is the victor. The natural eye sees Israel as the one doing the putting to death, but in reality God is the one delivering the enemies into their hands. So it is in the new covenant.

There is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses” (Col 2:13). God’s wrath has been already removed from us by the cancellation of the law’s curse through Christ nailed to the tree. The whole warp and woof of this letter is to fix our hope in the objective realities of what Jesus Christ has done for us in the past as the basis of grace of what He will do through us today.

The life of faith teaches us this. If I see some sin operating in my life, this should cause me to come running back to the Gospel and seeking the above—the objective truth of what God has already done for me in Christ. If the problems of chapter 3 are in my life, my heart needs to run to chapters 1 and 2 to drink in the medicine of the Gospel. As faith in Christ rests in the truth of the Good News, God acts to manifest Christ to us, we appear with Jesus in glory, and the power of Christ puts to death that sin. Now through faith and patience we inherit the promises. Sin may be raging but faith looks to the unseen and waits for God to act. I turn away from my performance to effect some kind of change. Any change that does not come from the revelation of Christ to my soul is not real change. It will sure fade just as the glory of Moses’ face under the Old Covenant faded. The heart of the Old Covenant is what I do for God. The heart of the New Covenant is what God does for me in Christ. Our strong encouragement, therefore, is to immerse our hearts in amazement at what Christ has done for us, how He rescued us through His own death on the tree.

On the one side, this glory manifests as the putting off of the sins of the flesh. On the positive side, this glory showcases the true nature of our Lord Jesus in character—love, humility, kindness, mercy. The expressions of these characteristics are Christ. To the natural eye it looks like us, but the spiritual reality it is Christ. “It is no longer I but Christ that lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

Problems Downstairs? Go Upstairs!

A pithy one-liner that came to mind as I was studying Colossians has been a tremendous example of seeking the above. “If you are having problems downstairs, go upstairs.” “Upstairs” is the vision that God has of us as perfected people because of the finished work of Jesus Christ. Colossians is filled with hope “upstairs”, unveiling the beautiful relationship each Christian has a holy, blameless, spotless child of God. Our life “downstairs” is the lab class that proves we’ve grasped the lecture. Within the last year or so, I have developed a holy habit of running to what Christ has done for me in this verse:

he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him (Col 1:22)

Many times I fall short of my own expectations, my wife’s expectations, my friend’s expectations, and others’ expectations. Instead of being tempted to despair, I find that my heart has a safety net to keep me from being injured from the criticisms of others (many rightly so but perhaps not delivered in a way that feels all warm and fuzzy). I “go upstairs” to remind my own heart at that moment that I am holy and blameless and above reproach in the eyes of God. Christ paid my ransom for all my sins and failures, including the one I’m dealing with at the moment. From that wellspring of hope based upon truth that never changes, my attitude and response can be loving and not sullen, withdrawn, sarcastic, argumentative, or other pet sins to defend my bruised “honor” (which is really pride). During these kinds of tests more than any other verse I have experienced first hand the grace of God in this holy habit of running to Jesus, the One who has given Himself to save me from this present evil age.

As we come to a close, it is my sincere hope that the Lord might use these collections of meditations on Christ in this awesome book of Colossians to stir you to come to the Lord yourself to make alive the precious cargo laden within. The message of a colossal Christ and an extravagantly willing Father to grant me fullness in His Son has become a cornerstone for walking in a manner that’s worthy of the Gospel. I have allowed the warnings to marinate in my soul to avoid the worthless. I am strongly encouraged that my only hope is seeking the above, keeping my heart aligned with the Word of truth that puts the spotlight on grace where the Lord Jesus Christ is ever and always in the limelight.