

**Paul's Letter to the Colossians**  
**Week 2**  
**Colossians 1:21-2:12**

**Day One**

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

v. 21 – Paul was writing to Gentiles, reminding them that once they were separated from God with no chance of closing that gap apart from converting to Judaism. It is of special note that Paul pointed out that they were enemies of God in their minds! Their mind caused wrong thinking that in turn caused sinful behavior, which created the alienation. This indicates how important it is to align your thoughts with the Word and will of God, in order for your actions to follow suit.

Yet we cannot simply decide to align our thoughts without the help of God's Spirit:

The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (Romans 8:6-8).

v. 22 – The reconciliation process was an expensive one, for it was consummated through the death of Jesus. Because of Jesus' death, we are presented to God through Christ without blemish and free from accusation. You and I stand before God and He accuses us of nothing from our past. What's more, this process of justification – making me “just-as-if-I'd-never-sinned” – is an ongoing process. I had a friend say once that when we sin, it isn't the time to run *from* God but *to* God, to ask forgiveness. This truth is borne out in Hebrews:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).

**Do you run from God or to God when you fail?**

v. 23 – This verse expands on the truth revealed in the previous verse and in Hebrews quoted above. You are free from blemish only if you continue in your faith in Christ as presented in the good news of the gospel. While the gospel has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, not everyone is aware or can or does receive this good news. We cannot take this verse to mean that every creature has heard the gospel, but we can say

that every creature has been exposed to the gospel effect, which is access to God. As pointed out in last week's study, all of creation has felt the effects of the Fall and the consequent effects of Christ's death and redemptive work.

Paul stated that he had become a servant of the message of the gospel. That is how it is with your life work and purpose. You become its servant; it doesn't become yours. While you can often make your living from the message and purpose God gives you, your life and work is still shaped by its content and emphasis. **What is your life purpose? What message or life work are you serving?**

## Day Two

24 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. 25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.

v. 24 – Paul had suffered to fulfill his purpose and his suffering resulted in a great gain for anyone who received the gospel. Paul understood what was at stake in his work, so he rejoiced that he had the opportunity to suffer for so great a cause. Paul said he completed what was still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions.

### **Did this mean that there was something incomplete about Christ's work?**

Absolutely not! Yet there is suffering that must occur if the work of Christ is to go forward. These afflictions must be endured by Christ's servants and, in a sense, are shared by Christ since those servants are part of His body.

### **Are you suffering for the work and purpose that Christ has given you to do? Are you rejoicing while you suffer? Is your suffering contributing to the success of the work in Christ?**

v. 25 – Paul returned to the concept that he was a servant, but not of the people (although he certainly did serve people wherever he went). He was a servant of the message that God had given him and that message was specifically to the Gentiles. The cross opened the way for them to come to God and God had commissioned Paul to deliver that message. Paul designed his life and focused all his activities so that everything would serve the delivery of the message.

I love this idea of serving one's purpose. I serve my purpose message, the message that God gave me in 1991. I have written, developed resources and focused on how I can serve this message and disseminate it to as many people as possible. I have spent my own money to develop my website and three blog sites, all so that the purpose message can go forward.

**Whom or what are you serving? In what ways? How can you be a more effective servant?**

v. 26 – A biblical mystery is a truth that was once hidden but now revealed. The mystery that Paul referred to was that the way to God was now open to the Gentiles, which was always God’s intent. He had simply started with the Jews. The Jews, however, could never see this mystery because they wanted to maintain the belief that they were the only ones who would ever have that kind of access. Yet Paul was entrusted with the message that the way to God was open for Gentiles according to the mystery of God.

**Day Three**

27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. 29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

v. 27 – The mystery was no longer a mystery (as we think of an unsolved or unexplained phenomenon) by the time Paul referred to it as a mystery. **Does that confuse you?** A mystery novel, for example, has lots of unexplained twists and turns that keep the reader guessing until the very end. I suppose there is an element to that in a spiritual mystery, but there is no ambivalence about a biblical mystery’s meaning. It was once unclear but now is clear to everyone, including principalities and powers. Christ came to open the way to God and that way includes Gentiles. It wasn’t always clear that God’s plan was to include Gentiles, but now it is and that makes it a mystery revealed.

v. 28 – Paul’s purpose was to take the gospel to the Gentiles. When he did that, God was with him and gave him supernatural help. Paul was aware of what God had created him to do and he mentioned it in *every* epistle he wrote. **What has God created you to do? Can you describe it? Do you talk it about it freely?**

Paul made tents for a living, but he never saw himself as a “tent maker.” What did he have to say about his purpose? In every epistle he wrote, he referred to what he had been born to do and *never* did he write that it was to make tents. He was clear enough to talk about his purpose every chance he had. Below is a summary of passages from Paul’s letters that describe his purpose of taking the gospel to the Gentiles.

- Romans 1:5, 13, 16
- Romans 15:7-29
- 1 Corinthians 1:17,24
- 1 Corinthians 3:5-15
- 2 Corinthians 5:16-21
- 2 Corinthians 10:12-18
- Galatians 1:15-16
- Galatians 2:2, 7-9

- Ephesians 3:1-10, 7-12
- Philippians 1:12-18
- Colossians 1:27-29
- 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5
- 1 Thessalonians 2:16
- 2 Thessalonians 3:1-4
- 1 Timothy 2:5-7
- 2 Timothy 4:17
- Titus 1:1-3

While Paul did not specifically mention his purpose in his epistle to Philemon, he was writing about an escaped slave who was now a Christian. The whole letter addressed a problem that was unique to the Gentile world, which was Paul's sphere of ministry.

v. 29 – Paul had divine energy working in him to accomplish his purpose. **What does God energize you to do? When do you seem to have divine wisdom at your disposal?** Even though Paul had divine help, he labored. **Purpose is hard work?** It consumes you without using you up and even introduces some struggles in your life. Those struggles aren't an indication that you are doing something wrong, but rather something right.

I have seen too many people dismiss their challenges as evidence that God is *not* endorsing or blessing what they are doing. I think you must be careful not to jump to that conclusion too soon when trials come. When they do come, consider Paul and his life of purpose before you abandon your own work.

#### Day Four

1 I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. 2 My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

2:1 – Paul mentioned his struggles on behalf of the saints in churches that he had never met. In some sense, we are included in that group, for Paul's struggles have served us well. God worked in and through him to write his letters, borne out of great pain and suffering. Yet those challenges gave him great wisdom and insight and no one, except the Lord Jesus, had a greater impact on the Church then or now than the apostle Paul.

Paul wanted the Colossians to know that he had struggles, but that he knew that God was using those struggles for the benefit of the Church everywhere, as Paul had written to the Philippians:

But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me (Philippians 2:17-18).

Paul did not care that he was being poured out on behalf of others. Yet Paul was not doing it for the people; he was doing it for his Lord Jesus. You can only do what you are purposed to do if you keep your focus on the Lord Himself. Even Jesus, while performing a great act of sacrifice for mankind, did it unto the Father.

The burnt offering in the Old Testament was the only offering that was not consumed, in part or in totality, by the priests. It was completely burned up and thus exclusively devoted to God. You must always keep that perspective in your purpose work, for your challenges and the price you pay to fulfill your purpose can never be fully appreciated by others. God sees and knows and He will reward you accordingly, so don't be discouraged:

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

v. 2 – **Why did Paul endure such challenges in the will and purpose of God?** He did so that people around the world would know the mystery of God and that mystery was Christ. **What did Paul hope to see accomplished in the lives of the people?** He wanted to see that they 1) were encouraged; 2) united in love; and 3) had the full riches of complete understanding to know the mystery of God's love revealed in Christ.

It was always all about Christ in the lives and work of the apostles. They were not about doing their own work or establishing their pet projects. They were about the task of being used by God to open the eyes of as many as possible to the reality and centrality of Jesus in the plan of God. **Is Christ central in all that you do? In your thoughts and affections? Do others know that?**

v. 3 – Paul saw that treasures of wisdom were hidden in Christ. In some sense, this was even manifest in the way Jesus taught. He had wisdom but it was hidden or concealed in parables, which were accessible to those who had a heart to know. Those who did not have the heart or will went home without understanding the main point. If you don't take the time and have the will to see and understand, you can easily miss the things of God. While wisdom is hidden in Christ, that wisdom is not inaccessible. It is like hidden treasure that requires some digging or diving but the reward is worth the effort. **Are you paying a price to dig for treasures hidden in Christ? What treasures have you found?**

### Day Five

4 I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. 5 For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. 6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

v. 4 – **What kind of arguments was Paul guarding against?** Based on the context, they had to be arguments that tried to make Jesus anything less than Paul described him to be. There must have been heretical positions circulating that tried to explain away Jesus’ divinity. What’s more, these arguments must have been “high-sounding” and very convincing, while also being deceptive and filled with error. This is why it is important to be well-grounded in the doctrines of the faith so that you are not susceptible to such arguments. I have had door-to-door evangelists from sects and cults visit my home and try to engage me in debate with some clever twists on biblical doctrine. These would also qualify as find-sounding but deceptive and could capture those who don’t know what they believe.

v. 5 – Paul had not been physically present in Colosse, but he carried the church in his heart and was present in spirit. Paul wanted this church to succeed and success was defined in terms of their doctrinal discipline and faith. The Colossians brought great delight to Paul because of their spiritual health, although one must assume that the Colossians had their share of struggles as they dealt with the false doctrines that were assaulting them. I have often said that if your enemy can’t keep us from the truth, he will attempt to pervert that truth by creating ambiguity or fanaticism.

When enemies are at war, part of the warfare plan involves disrupting communications. That is certainly a common tactic of our enemy. **Have you been experiencing any communications battles lately?** You can be sure that it is evidence of the war that we are in and confirmation that we have an intelligent ruthless enemy who opposes us and hates our Lord.

v. 6 – Paul urged the Colossians to continue to live out their faith in a manner consistent with their introduction to the gospel. Paul’s directives were simple in order for that to occur. First, they had to be rooted and built up in Christ. When I read that, I think of Psalm 1:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. (Psalm 1:1-3).

They had not only to be rooted in Him, but then bear fruit in Him as well. **How is your root structure in Christ? And are you being built up in Him? How do you know? What evidence of being built up in Him can you produce?**

Then, they had to be strengthened in the faith they were taught. They were not free to wander from that faith or exercise it according to what they felt was proper. They had to be true to the apostolic foundation that was laid, presumably by Epaphras. Faith serves to strengthen you as your roots deepen and your fruit increases. **Is your faith growing and**

**is it consequently strengthening your life and work? What evidence can you point out to justify your answer?**

Finally, Paul instructed the Colossians to be thankful. I have found myself waking up for the last six months and thanking God for many things as soon as I open my eyes. I have also been faithfully journaling my thanks to God for His work and faithfulness to my family and me. **Are you thankful? What evidence do you have that you are more thankful today than ever before in your life? Perhaps it's time to offer an offering of thanksgiving, perhaps a gift to poor, as an expression of your thanks to God?**

### Day Six

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. 9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

v. 8 – Paul was concerned and burdened that the Colossians not succumb to the attack they were under, an attack made up of high-sounding but deceptive arguments and philosophies. **How could the Colossians determine which arguments were sound and which ones were not?** They would be judged solely on their ability to exalt Jesus. Those that did not were to be rejected. Once again we see that for the apostles kept the focus of their work and teaching on the person of Jesus Christ. If it did not exalt Him and focus on faith in Christ, they were not interested. This is the work of the Church – to exalt and proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

In this context, Paul was not warning against any teaching that did not even mention Jesus. He was warning against philosophies that reduced Jesus to anything less than the fullness of God. **Why do I point this out?** I do so because there are some who take this admonition to mean that *anything* that doesn't mention or exalt Jesus is to be avoided in church work. I have often heard this verse used as justification for rejecting management and business teaching or some other cultural expression of worship and leadership. Those who do so reject those principles as “basic principles of the world.” That was not what Paul was referring to in this verse. **Does that make sense to you?**

v. 9 – Christ was the fullness of God in bodily form, the word made flesh, dwelling among us.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

Jesus did not appear to be in bodily form. He was not a phantom, nor did He only inhabit a body, abandoning it on the cross. Jesus had a flesh and blood body like ours (without sin); what's more, our flesh now resides in heaven at the right hand of God! Anyone who denies this basic truth is not a Christian and is under the influence of a demonic doctrine

that denies the full expression of Jesus as God and man. This is the issue that Paul was addressing in these verses.

This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world (1 John 4:2-3).

v. 10 – Jesus told His disciples that He had been given all authority in heaven and earth, which meant He was exalted above all things.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18).

This is critical because any doctrine that does not provide for the fullness of Christ's exaltation does not allow His saints to ascend to the same level.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-7).

**Do you walk in the reality that you have been exalted to high places, not due to your own merits but due to the work of Christ?** This is important because if you do not, then you are not praying or laying hold of the authority that is yours in Christ to extend to the gospel and live a victorious life.

### Day Seven

11 In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

v. 11 – You and I were circumcised in Christ, circumcision being a symbol of the sinful flesh being put off. Paul saw that circumcision was a shadow or type of the reality to come in Christ, and this is why Paul was so adamant that Christians not rely in any way, shape, or form on literal circumcision. Circumcision was something that only pointed forward to the reality that was to come in Christ; once He came, circumcision became meaningless.

What's more, a human agent always performed natural circumcision. The circumcision we have that put away our sinful nature was an act of God and in no way could be emulated or carried out by man. I am powerless to obtain my own salvation or spiritual good; it is act according to the grace of God.

Paul understood that he could not allow any doctrine or act, no matter how symbolic or even biblical in its roots, to overshadow the work of Jesus. As I have stated again and again, Jesus was everything for the apostles. It was all about Him and they jealously guarded His role and place in the minds of the faithful. **Are you doing the same?** If you are, you are walking in apostolic tradition, regardless of whether or not you believe in bishops, liturgy or modern-day apostles. The most important doctrines are those that exalt and preserve the supremacy of Christ in the life and heart of the Church.

v. 12 – Paul then moved to discuss the rite of baptism, in which we were buried in Christ and raised to newness of life. There are some groups who teach that no one is fully saved until they are baptized. Orthodox Christianity has rejected that as a doctrine that reduces the role of Christ in a subtle way. We are saved through the blood of Jesus and, because we put our faith in Him, we follow Him into the waters of baptism as a first act of obedience and recognition of His Lordship in our lives. Baptism does not save us; we are baptized as evidence that we are saved.

You are buried with Christ in baptism and raised through faith into a resurrected life in Him right here and now. Hallelujah! I have resurrection life now, a down payment of what is yet to come!

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:1-4).