

Truth for Today

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Paul's Letter to the Colossians: Christ in you the hope of glory - Colossians 1:19-2:3

My wife recently asked me to buy a particular type of cleaning fluid. As I scanned the supermarket shelves I found the brand name and duly bought a bottle. Yes, it was the correct brand; my wife claimed it was an excellent cleansing agent, but it was not suitable for the job in hand. Another product from the same manufacturer was required. Happily, in speaking of spiritual matters, we find that the Lord Jesus is not only the most excellent Person to meet our need but He provides for every condition and circumstance. Our further consideration of this lovely letter to the Colossians will show this to be so.

Our subject today covers Colossians 1:19-2:3. Before we look at this passage, let us remind ourselves of the purpose of the letter. The Apostle Paul wrote it at a time when erroneous teaching was spreading in the church of God as a whole and the church at Colosse was similarly under attack. Further, a system of teaching, known as Gnosticism, was beginning to be introduced, and this church would also have been troubled by it. The word "Gnosticism" means "knowledge"; these people said, "I know", but their teaching was far from the truth.

Amongst other things, they denied the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and His work of redemption. Thus, the matter was so serious that the Apostle deals with these things in his letter. It is most interesting to note that Paul does not try to deal with specific allegations which are raised but, rather, he takes the positive approach to these matters with clear positive statements. This leads to the great point: Christ is all we need, all our future is bound up with Him.

We learned in Colossians 1:1-18 of the twofold Headship of Christ: the Headship of Creation and the Headship of the Church. We will see, as we go on, two more pairs also linked with creation and the Church. These are:

1. Colossians 1:20-22 The twofold reconciliation, the reconciliation of all things (creation) and our reconciliation (the church); and,
2. Colossians 1:23-29 Paul's twofold ministry - the gospel (preached in all creation), and the church, (to present every man perfect in Christ).

The incomparable Head

Let us begin with Colossians 1:19. Who is it who has these Headships? Who is it that is able to bring reconciliation? Paul has to bring in here the full nature of the Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom he is speaking. "*For in Him was all the fullness pleased to dwell*" we read (JN Darby Translation). The King James Version says, "*...it pleased the Father...*" This addition was supplied to try to assist the understanding but, if it is used, it should really refer to "the Godhead", not just "the Father".

To help us understand this statement we can refer to Colossians 2:9: "*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*" So here is a direct statement of His Deity. All the fullness of the Godhead includes the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In John 14:9-10, the Lord Jesus says, "*He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father ... I am in the Father, and the Father in Me.*" We also read His words in John 3:34, "*He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him.*" There was not just "a measure" of the Holy Spirit with the Lord Jesus but the Spirit was in Him in all fullness. All the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him.

The term "fullness" also is interesting. The Gnostics gave it a true meaning of absolute perfection of deity. Their trouble was that they would not allow this to be applied to Christ. However, Paul, in his glorious way, reminds the Colossians that in the Lord Jesus Christ was absolute perfection of Deity, in whom Father, Son and Holy Spirit, were pleased to dwell (Colossians 1:19). The One who has the headship in creation, the headship of the Church, the only One who displayed the Father in all His perfection in this world, is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, in our day, we can rejoice both in the Deity and completeness of the One who has so cared for us, and in no one else.

The two reconciliations

So, having established the Person, the Apostle is able to go on to His work. In Colossians 1:20-22 we now learn of the two reconciliations. The term "reconciliation" includes the bringing together of two opposed parties to the point of understanding and agreement. How is it possible for this to be done? The very One who displayed all the fullness of the Godhead, who ever blessed and met every need, was the One whom man rejected and hated without a cause. In spite of all man was and is, God had determined to reconcile man with Himself. At the very time when man would finally demonstrate all his hatred against the Lord Jesus by crucifying Him on the Cross, God would display, through the Lord Jesus, the wonder of His everlasting love and great grace. It was at the cross, through the blood of His cross, that He made peace. Here was the place of reconciliation, the place where peace was made.

a. In all creation

We can first note that, through the cross, there is a reconciliation of all things to Himself, in earth or in heaven (Colossians 1:20). This is the first reconciliation. It includes all creation and the whole universe. When Adam sinned, the whole world was plunged into disarray.

We live now in a groaning world, Romans 8:21-22. All is in disorder. Satan and his wicked spirits are in the heavens and there is defilement there. But all the power of evil will be defeated. Through "*the blood of the cross*" all will be restored when the Lord comes again and "*all things are put in subjection under His feet*" (Hebrews 2:8).

We have a reference to this in Acts 3:19-21, where Peter speaks of the times of refreshing which shall "*come from the presence of the Lord: and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the Heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began*".

So the Old Testament prophets also spoke of this. For instance, look at Isaiah 11:6-9, where harmony is restored. "*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb ... The cow and the bear shall feed ... The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*". What a wonderful time is coming for the whole earth in that day of the reign of the Lord Jesus over this world!

It may well be asked if the unsaved are included in this reconciliation. These are they who have previously rejected "the blood of His cross" and remain in their sins. There is no suggestion in the Scriptures of the possibility of reconciliation then, only a pleading to men **now** to be reconciled with God, 2 Corinthians 5:20. The blessing of God in reconciliation through Christ is the point of Colossians 1, and Colossians 1:20 refers to "*things in earth, or things in heaven*."

When there is a question of obedience to His authority, this is a different matter. Then we read in Philippians 2:10 that "*every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth*". Here those "*under the earth*" are included and must give honour, although they remain in their sins. Their destination is everlasting punishment and no future reconciliation is found in the Word of God.

b. Reconciliation for believers (the church)

While the earth is awaiting the reconciliation of all things, there is a second reconciliation referred to in Colossians 1:21-22. "*And you, who at one time were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh, through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight*."

How vastly different this is for those who have already believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, including believers today. What assurance it brings! Reconciliation has already been made. We were enemies once (Colossians 1:21), but no longer. Once, because of our sins, we could look forward only to eternal punishment but now we are reconciled. We are seen as unblameable and unproveable. God Himself only sees the work of Christ, "the blood of His cross" and everyone who has trusted the Lord Jesus as Saviour is reconciled forever.

In reconciliation, God has come to a judicial peace with us; we have come to a submissive peace with God. Are we thankful today for all that our Saviour has done for us? This tremendous achievement has been brought about by the One whom Paul has shown to have full Deity, God Himself, and this brings with it the full satisfaction which only God can offer.

There are words of caution in Colossians 1:23, which reads, "*If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard...*" Every believer who has been reconciled will continue in the faith and will not be moved away. However, there are many who hear the gospel and know that it is true but reject and turn away from its truth. By this they show that they were never truly reconciled in the first place.

The two ministries.

a. The gospel - in all creation (Colossians 1:23).

One of the responsibilities the Apostle had been given by God Himself was to preach the Gospel. To do so, he had travelled far through the civilised world of his day. To him the Gospel included not only the good news of salvation but covered the good news of the full eternal blessing of all believers everywhere leading into the blessings in glory. Yet how vital to the Apostle that men everywhere come to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. All other Bible teaching is of no value unless it leads to a settlement of the matter of sin. Only the 'good news' of the gospel will make the difference. Therefore he was concerned that it be "*preached to every creature which is under heaven.*" He was made a minister of this gospel. Is this a ministry you are exercising too?

b. The ministry concerning the Church (Colossians 1:24-29).

The Apostle also tells us in Colossians 1:25 that he is "*made a minister ... to fulfil the word of God.*" He tells us what this involved. Preaching the gospel and teaching the truth of "*the mystery*", as he calls it in Colossians 1:26, cost him dearly in troubles and afflictions. He lists some of these in 2 Corinthians 11:23-30. He believes suffering to be necessary to make the sorrows of Christ complete. This does not mean that the work of Christ on the Cross was in any way incomplete but the servant of Christ has his part in knowing something of suffering when active on the work of his Lord.

More important than his own suffering, Paul also tells us what the teaching involved. It concerned "*the mystery*", he says, "*which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but is now made manifest to His saints*", Colossians 1:26. We need to understand this mystery.

The Mystery

First, a mystery, in the biblical usage of the word, is something that was unknown but is now made known. This mystery was unknown throughout the Old Testament period but has now been made known to New Testament "saints", that is, all who have believed in the work of the Lord Jesus at Calvary and have been separated to Christ. It is not restricted to the Jewish nation; it has been made known to Gentiles also. Then we learn that it concerns the Lord Jesus Christ. What is this mystery?

We learn, in the Old Testament, of prophecies concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus, His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, His coming to reign. So the mystery is none of these. Ah, the Apostle says, "*God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*", Colossians 1:27. Paul describes this as "the riches of the glory of this mystery". It is so wonderful; it abounds with the blessing of God. So what has been provided? God has seen fit now to make known, since the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the truth concerning the Church of God. The Lord Jesus, as Head, in heaven, gathers in one body on earth, all believers whether Jew or Gentile. All are one in Him as the church on earth, as Paul writes, "*Christ in you the hope of glory*" (Colossians 1:27).

Everything looks forward to the final consummation - in glory - where the "body" will be with the "Head". The whole purpose of the Apostle is to warn every man - of the consequences of missing out of the blessings - and teach every man of the great blessings provided by God that we may be wise and perfect. This word "perfect" brings the thought of being mature or full grown. When we really get a grasp of what the Lord has done we take on a fuller character of a true Christian in this world. This was so important to the Apostle that he actively laboured to this end.

Reasons for his work

In Colossians 2:1-4, Paul speaks of some reasons for writing. It seems that those in Laodicea and Colosse had never seen the Apostle. But he happily includes you and me here too when he writes, "*as many as have not seen my face in the flesh*" (Colossians 2:1). The understanding of this "mystery" is of such vital and valuable importance that its truth must be constantly asserted. It must never be overlooked. False teaching was bound to come but should never be allowed to replace that which is right. So Paul refers to the possibility "*lest any man should beguile you with enticing words*", (Colossians 2:4). May we never lose the joy of knowing all that God has purposed for the future.

But there is another reason for his writing. There was a great conflict, an anxiety within him that, without the understanding of this wonderful truth, there would be much missing. But in the learning of it the believers would be so "comforted", or encouraged. Their hearts "*being knit together in love*" (Colossians 2:2) that is, having put these things together in their minds, their love would abound. This is what a full understanding would bring.

God has done so much for each one of us. May we seize these truths again today and be refreshed in the knowledge that we have been reconciled to Him. May the provision He has made of placing each one of us, as believers, within the One body of the church, linked with our Lord in Heaven, thrill us again. May we look forward with longing to the moment when all will be complete. We shall be together with Him in the soon coming day. What a day that will be!

Let us pray

Lord Jesus, we thank Thee for Thy provision for us both in this world and in that eternity with Thee. May we rejoice again today for all Thy blessings. We long for Thee to come, perhaps today. Amen.

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