

## **10/21/2021 – Colossians, The Faithful Disciple**

### **Unit III: Lesson 2, A Faithful Disciple's Ministry of Reconciliation**

#### **Reading: Colossians 1:24-2:5**

#### **SUMMARY**

Paul continues to strengthen the Colossians by reminding them of his suffering for them, his divine commission, and his personal interest and care for the Colossians. He talks of his own sufferings as a “completing of the sufferings of Christ.” That is not easily understood unless it is understood that Paul is suffering for the sake of others just as Christ did. Furthermore, such suffering, within the body of Christ, is really a continuation of the suffering of Christ. So close is the identification of Christ with His people.

Paul's real ministry is to make fully known the Gospel. That happens when it is both proclaimed faithfully and received in faith. Then the Gospel attains its purpose. The real "mystery" of the Gospel is revealed only to those who receive it with faith. **UNLIKE THE Gnostic MYSTERIES, THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL IS AVAILABLE TO ALL MANKIND. THE HEART OF THAT MYSTERY IS THE INCORPORATION OF JEW AND GENTILE INTO THE ONENESS OF CHRIST IN HIS BODY, THE CHURCH. THE MYSTERY IS SEALED BY THE INDWELLING OF CHRIST.** That is the certainty of our eternal life which is enjoyed now already in hope.

All of the exclusiveness of the human race contradicts the Gospel, says Paul. **CHRIST IS FOR EVERY MAN. THERE ARE NO SPIRITUAL PRIVILEGES. NO ONE WILL REACH SPIRITUAL MATURITY OR FIND THE FATHER UNLESS HE IS "IN CHRIST."** Paul, therefore, labors and strives in the Gospel with might. His word and work strengthen believers and his loving approach opens for them **THE REVELATION OF GOD WITHIN THE COMMUNITY OF LOVING CHRISTIANS.** For the heart of the mystery **IS CHRIST HIMSELF. GOD IS THE REVEALER NO MATTER HOW MUCH MAN SEEKS.** Thus, Paul closes this section with a warning to stand firm as any good army does when under attack, showing ultimate confidence in the commander – Christ the Head.

#### **A CLOSER LOOK**

##### **Verse 1:24-2:5**

A sort of natural outline presents itself here. Paul really deals with three subjects: (1) his sufferings for the sake of the Colossians, (2) his divine commission, (3) his personal interest in and care for the Colossians.

##### **Verse 24:**

"for your sake" – Paul's sufferings are not self-inflicted but have come about as a result of his labors for believers like the Colossians. He expands the idea with the later phrase "the church."

"complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" – In what sense can Christ's sufferings be "lacking" anything? Two things must be understood. First of all, by suffering for God and His work, one is drawn into the "fellowship of Christ's sufferings" (Phil. 3:8-10). Paul's sufferings, like Christ's, are vicarious (i.e., they are experienced in behalf of others). PAUL DOES NOT MEAN TO SAY THAT HIS SUFFERINGS ARE REDEMPTIVE. The point here is that they are in behalf of others. SUFFERING BELONGS TO THE CHRISTIAN'S CALLING! The second point is what is commonly called "corporate personality." The Church is one with Christ, its Head. WHEN ONE SUFFERS OR IS PERSECUTED FOR CHRIST, SO CLOSE IS THAT IDENTIFICATION THAT IT BECOMES THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST HIMSELF (Acts 9:4 - "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me" (Jesus)?). Christ continues to suffer through His body, the Church. THE CHURCH IS BUILT UP BY REPEATED ACTS OF SELF-DENIAL IN SUCCESSIVE INDIVIDUALS AND SUCCESSIVE GENERATIONS.

**Verse 25-27:**

Paul then defines his ministry as (1) a high trust from God, (2) a propagation of the Gospel, (3) one of pastoral concern.

**Verse 25:**

"divine office" – The Greek word here is the word for steward - *oikonomia*. Paul's ministry is a high trust from God which imposes a duty on him. That is why he is writing to the Colossians. Note how this comes out in the words "which *was given* to me *for you*." (Compare 1 Cor. 4:1).

"make the word of God fully known" – The idea here is expressed in the Greek word "fulfill" which does not appear in the English. THE WORD OF GOD IS "FULFILLED" WHEN IT IS PROCLAIMED IN THE WORLD AND RECEIVED BY FAITH. IT THEN ACCOMPLISHES ITS *PURPOSE* IT IS "FULFILLED."

"mystery hidden for ages" – Paul plays here on the word "mystery." The Greek word is the same word for "to *initiate*" or "to reveal a secret to which initiation is the key." THE TEACHERS OF HERESY PURPORT TO REVEAL MYSTERIES. PAUL HAS A MYSTERY OF HIS OWN TO REVEAL!

"to his saints" – THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL IS "MANIFESTED" ONLY TO THOSE WHO BY FAITH WILL RECEIVE IT. UNLIKE THE Gnostic "MYSTERIES", HOWEVER, IT IS AVAILABLE TO *ALL MANKIND!*

**Verse 26:**

"Gentiles" – The saving purpose of God was a major theme in the Old Testament. That the Gentiles would be included was also seen (Is. 49:6). THAT JEW AND GENTILE WOULD BE JOINED TOGETHER BY INCORPORATION INTO THE BODY OF CHRIST WAS NOT SEEN, HOWEVER!

"Christ in you, the hope of glory" – This is the other dimension of the mystery of the Gospel. CHRIST DWELLING IN HIS PEOPLE IS OUR HOPE OF GLORY. "GLORY" HERE REFERS TO ETERNAL LIFE. THAT REMAINS A "HOPE" (it is still *future* in its final

realization). Compare Romans 8:18-25. In Ephesians 1:13-14 the *Spirit* is "the earnest of our inheritance." NOTE AGAIN HOW CHRIST IS SO CENTRAL IN COLOSSIANS THAT HE OCCUPIES THE SPHERE ELSEWHERE GIVEN TO THE SPIRIT.

#### **Verse 28:**

"every man . . . every man . . . every man" – The Jew would not agree that God had a use for every man. The Gnostic would never agree with that either. CHRIST, HOWEVER, IS FOR EVERY MAN. THIS VERSE IS A REJECTION OF THE GNOSTIC CLAIM TO SPIRITUAL PRIVILEGE OF ANY SORT.

"every man mature" – The word "mature" is the Greek word *teleios* "perfect." THIS WAS THE CLAIM OF THE GNOSTIC – THAT BY RISING THROUGH THE LEVELS OF KNOWLEDGE ONE REACHED PERFECTION. PAUL WILL NOT GRANT THAT THIS IS THE PRIVILEGE OF A SPECIAL FEW. HE WILL *INSIST*, HOWEVER, THAT *NO ONE* WILL REACH SPIRITUAL MATURITY UNLESS HE IS "IN CHRIST."

#### **Verses 29:**

"toil, striving" – This passage shows how insistent the apostle is on bringing people to a true understanding of Christ. Both words come from the games of track and field and indicate the most strenuous of dedicated effort.

### **Chapter 2,**

#### **Verse 1:**

Paul again picks up the word used for "strive" in the previous verse - "agon" - from which we get our word "agony." THE UNIVERSAL SCOPE OF HIS TASK IS HIS REASON FOR ADDRESSING THEM. He seeks to serve all Christians, not simply the ones he himself evangelized.

#### **Verse 2:**

"hearts may be encouraged" – A better translation would be "strengthened." The idea is that they be confirmed in affectionate loyalty to Christ so that they are not overpowered by the intellectual pretensions of Gnosticism.

"knit together in love" – While the Greek verb here can mean "knit together," here it can also mean "instructed." "Instructed in love" would describe how Paul is approaching them. THAT IS NOT THE NATURE OF THE GNOSTIC "INSTRUCTION" WHICH DIVIDES, ELEVATES SOME, AND DOWNGRADES OTHERS. The rest of the verse then makes more sense. Paul instructs them in love "and so leads them on to *all* the riches . . ." What Paul is emphasizing here is that THE REVELATION OF GOD CANNOT BE PROPERLY KNOWN APART FROM THE CULTIVATION OF BROTHERLY LOVE WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY! Compare Ephesians 3:17 ff. – "rooted and grounded *in love*" they can acquire the power to "apprehend *with all the saints* . . ."

"understanding . . . knowledge" – Here are two favorite Gnostic terms again. IN CHRIST THE "UNDERSTANDING" OF THE COLOSSIANS IS "ASSURED" – THE ABILITY TO DISTINGUISH THE BETTER FROM THE WORSE. THAT IS PRECISELY THE QUESTION FACING THE COLOSSIANS! THE REAL "MYSTERY" IS *CHRIST HIMSELF!*

**Verse 3:**

"in whom are hid" – CHRIST IS THE DEPOSITORY OF ALL SPIRITUAL TRUTH. The word "hid" here receives great emphasis by being placed at the end of the Greek sentence. The implication is that IN CHRIST THERE ARE UNLIMITED STORES OF TRUTH. This truth is "hidden" BECAUSE IT CAN ONLY BE KNOWN BY *REVELATION*, NOT BY MAN'S CLIMBING OR SEEKING! *GOD IS THE REVEALER.*

**Verse 4:**

"delude you with beguiling speech" – The Greek word for "beguiling speech" is *pithanologia* and is taken from the law courts. It was the word for a lawyer's persuasive arguments which might enable the guilty to escape. Paul is referring to the Gnostics again.

**Verse 5:**

"good order . . . firmness" – Both of these are military terms. Paul compares the Colossians to an army under attack, but keeping its lines unbroken and with a firmness that shows its confidence in the commander. "LIKE A MIGHTY ARMY . . . . "

**Questions for Discussion**

1. What is your reaction to a statement like this: "All of the great teachers of the human race such as Plato, Socrates, Jesus Christ . . . . "?
2. Why does god allow His people to suffer? What is the "cause" of suffering? In what way does suffering "fill up the afflictions of Christ"?
3. What is the "mystery of the Gospel"? How would you apply this insight to life today?
4. According to St. Paul, in what situation does God reveal the deep things of the Gospel? What are the prerequisites for receiving such knowledge?
5. To what do you attribute the "beguiling words" so often used in religious matters? Why does God allow this to happen?