

Lesson 5

Christ is in You

Colossians 1:27-2:5

Colossians 1:27–2:5 (CSB)

²⁷God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

²⁸We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

²⁹I labor for this, striving with his strength that works powerfully in me.

¹For I want you to know how greatly I am struggling for you, for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me in person.

²I want their hearts to be encouraged and joined together in love, so that they may have all the riches of complete understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery—Christ.

³In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

⁴I am saying this so that no one will deceive you with arguments that sound reasonable.

⁵For I may be absent in body, but I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see how well ordered you are and the strength of your faith in Christ.

Introduction

In Colossians 1:26-27, the apostle Paul reveals the core purpose driving his ministry: the proclamation of the gospel. His dedication to this mission is a divine stewardship, a sacred trust given by God and commissioned personally by Jesus. This stewardship brought a profound responsibility, reflecting careful management and execution of God's revealed truths. Paul's commission involved bringing the gospel message to the Gentiles, as outlined in Ephesians 3:8 and 1 Timothy 1:4.

Paul approached his mission humbly, identifying as a servant rather than a figure of authority. He aligns himself with God's overarching plan for humanity's salvation, demonstrating his unwavering commitment to making the word of God known fully.

In verse 26, Paul describes the word of God as a "mystery," indicating previously undisclosed information now revealed through Christ. This mystery, unlike the pay-as-you-go secrets of pagan religions, was openly accessible and universally available. Paul's revelation emphasizes "Christ in you," highlighting the inclusion of Gentiles in God's kingdom and centering on Jesus as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.

Colossians 1:27 underscores the implications of this mystery for individuals and the church. The plural "you" refers collectively to Gentile believers, but the indwelling presence of Christ is also a personal reality for each believer. This indwelling, initiated at baptism and facilitated by the Holy Spirit, signifies

an intimate fellowship with God. The destruction of barriers between humanity and God through Christ forms the foundation of our hope and eternal glory.

As we explore Paul's teachings, we explore the depths of this mystery, the centrality of Christ in our lives, and the gospel's transformative power. This study aims to deepen our understanding and strengthen our faith, following Paul's example of dedication and stewardship in spreading the gospel.

1:27 - Christ is in You

You is written in plural form and seems to stress Gentile believers as a whole. This fits well with the plural phrase *among the Gentiles* used at the beginning of 1:27. God dwells in the new people of God, the church, corporately, through the Spirit. However, concluding that no individual application here would be a mistake. Scripture is clear that Christ takes up residence inside the heart of every believer.¹⁹ This is the carrying out of what Jesus foretold on the night of His betrayal: Jesus answered him, *If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him*, John 14:23.

The blessing of this very personal communion or fellowship began on the occasion of our baptism, where we *received the gift of the Holy Spirit*, Acts 2:38; 5:32; Titus 3:4-6. What is written by Paul in another place seems appropriate here:

... For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

– 2 Corinthians 6:16b

The fact that every wall of separation has been removed and destroyed, allowing the closest possible relationship with Christ, fuels our *hope of glory*. The theme of the gospel is the hope of eternal blessing and honor. Ephesians 1 summarizes it like this:

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

– Ephesians 1:13-14

More on the Indwelling...

Christ, by the Holy Spirit, dwells inside the believer, Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 2:22. See also Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1:7; 17-18; 3:8-10; 16-19; Philippians 4:19. When Christ comes to live in a believer, His presence is the anchor of the promise of heaven—the guarantee of future bliss eternally (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:1-5; Ephesians 1:13-14). The reality that Christ is living in Christianity is the experience of new life and hope of eternal glory. *The indwelling Christ and the indwelling Spirit are practically interchangeable thoughts for Paul* (cf. Romans 8:10-11).²⁰

1:28-29 – The Aim of Paul's Preaching

Paul proclaimed *Jesus*. He was the substance of their message, whether leading people to believe or strengthening those who already have. This was done with negative (*warning everyone*) and positive

(*teaching everyone*) exhortation. To *warn* a person would involve training and discipline. This is seen in how Paul admonished, criticized, and corrected people.²¹ To *teach* means to impart knowledge.

Focus again on 1:28. See the words *proclaim, warn, teach*. This is the pattern he followed in Colossians. Colossians 1:1-25 proclaims Christ. 2:6-23 warns against false teaching. 3:1-4.6 teaches about Christian living.²²

All of this was for the goal of *maturity*. Spiritual maturity involves becoming like Christ. This is continual on our part. We are constantly growing to be more like Him. This is never a finished work while dwelling on earth.

In Ephesians, Paul presents it this way:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

– Ephesians 4:11-13

1.29 – Christ fuels ministry

Labor in 1:29 means to work until the point of extreme fatigue. (“Toil” is used in the ESV.) Bullinger describes it as being “spent with labor.”²³ He continues this thought into 2:1 when he says, *I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you...* The work and *struggle* Paul agonized over prayer and standing firm against opponents of healthy teaching. In 1 Thessalonians 2:9, he mentions that he *worked night and day* for the gospel's sake. Much of this time was spent in prayer, 1 Thessalonians 3:10; 2 Timothy 1:3. Paul worked so hard in ministry that it brought him to exhaustion.

However, note the power source fueling him. Who supplied Paul with energy? *Struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me*. Paul was not left to his own devices as he did the work of an apostle. Jesus, via the Holy Spirit, was with Him daily, giving him the power to stay focused on his ministry. The same is true for us today.

2:1-3 - Three Ministry Goals for Every Church

Paul struggled so that:

- Their hearts would be encouraged.
- They would be knit together in love.
- They would experience the *riches* of full assurance and understanding, coming to a *knowledge* of Christ.

This leads to spiritual maturity, walking *in Him*, having been *rooted* and *established* in the faith, with a spirit of thanksgiving.

These three goals should be at the top of every Christian's list. They are the key to abundant living in Christ.

2:2a – Encouraged Hearts

God is the God of encouragement and comfort.

But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more.

– 2 Corinthians 7:6-7

We all trust in and experience the comfort God provides. We are promised to receive it when we ask in prayer, Philippians 4:6-7. Similarly, Paul labored hard to encourage, comfort, and strengthen first-century churches. He urged Christians to join him. Passages like 1 Thessalonians 5:11 rise to the top, where he says:²⁴ *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*

In Colossians 2:2a, *encouraged* comes from a Greek word meaning “call to one’s side.”²⁵ This is to strengthen, cheer, or help.

Of this, Barclay writes:

There was a Greek regiment which had lost heart and was utterly dejected. The general sent a leader to talk to it so that courage was reborn, and a body of dispirited men became fit again for heroic action. That is what *parakalein* means here. It is Paul’s prayer that the church may be filled with that courage which can cope with any situation.²⁶

Paul wanted the Christians in Colossae to be built up and strengthened at the very core of who they were . . . where its impact would be felt not only in their emotions but down into their thoughts and decisions. While in these verses, Paul speaks on a congregational level, there is always room for personal application. Strong Christians form strong congregations.

Thinking individually, the heart is the center of our personality, the source of our will, thoughts, and emotions. It affects every aspect of who we are. The heart always needs to be strong, for it is where life’s difficult decisions are made. The word of God fortifies and matures our hearts. In the historical context, the hearts of the Colossian believers needed to be strong because of the ongoing threat of false teachers.

Christians today would do well to think about this. Our priority when dealing with others is to strengthen and encourage, not tear down and destroy. *Where can I build up? How can I help strengthen what is good? What are some things I can compliment them on? How can I see the good in others?* There are appropriate times for correction and admonition²⁷, but the most important thing is that we look for ways *to stimulate others to love and good works*, Hebrews 10:24.

2:2b – Knit Together in Love

Without love, a local church will cease to exist. Christianity is not just an intellectual pursuit. The heart made strong and fortified by the word of God, turns naturally outward . . . focusing on others to the point that it becomes committed to welding itself together with others in the Lord. That is the idea behind the expression *knit together*, which is not common in the Biblical text. Outside of Scripture, being *knit together* carries the meaning of reconciliation.²⁸ This is the heart that values others and sees them in light of their new identity in Christ, no matter who they are or where they have come from.

It is the fulfillment of Jesus’ prayer for unity in John 17:20-21:

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Francis Schaeffer has written:

We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus’ claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians.²⁹

Therefore, each local church member must be committed to moving inside harmonious relationships with love as the key motivation. *Let all that you do be done in love*, 1 Corinthians 16:14. We also read:

So, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

– Philippians 2:1-2

The type of love Paul has in mind here is one’s “rugged commitment” to another person in presence, advocacy, and mutual growth and development in becoming like Christ. This is more than a mere simple affection for, but a commitment to each other as they grow more unified in Christ, sharing their lives.³⁰ See 3:11.

2:2c-5 – Assurance of Understanding and Knowledge of Christ

Paul spoke in abundance at the end of verse 2. He wanted the Colossians to experience the *riches* or *wealth* that *full assurance* brings. Using the term *riches*, Paul wanted them to explore the treasure they had been given with eagerness. *Full assurance* carries the idea of deep conviction³¹, i.e., rock-solid trust that motivates a person to act out his or her faith.

What are we to have full assurance of? Paul lists three things:

Understanding

This type of knowledge refers to fully knowing Jesus and acting accordingly. Barclay describes it as “the ability to assess any situation and decide what practical course of action is necessary.”³²

Knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ

This is the ability to understand something clearly and distinctly as accurate or valid. It suggests whether our response is positive or negative.

The *mystery* of Christ, formerly not revealed, has now been proclaimed! Isaiah looked ahead to Jesus when he wrote:

The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness, and he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is Zion’s treasure.

– Isaiah 33:5-6

Wisdom

This word involves the application of knowledge, emphasizing a person's ability to confirm and commend the truth with intelligence after it has been grasped. It is, in essence, the thought behind Peter's teaching in 1 Peter 3:15 when he calls upon Christians to give a reason for the hope *within them*.³³

Conclusion

Paul was profoundly committed to the stewardship of the gospel. This stewardship was not merely a task but a divine responsibility to reveal the mystery of Christ, particularly to the Gentiles. Paul's portrayal of this mystery, "Christ in you," signifies the inclusion of the Gentiles into God's kingdom and the intimate, transformative relationship every Christian has with Christ.

This indwelling of Christ through the Holy Spirit is a source of hope, strength, and assurance for every Christian. It anchors our faith and promises eternal glory, embodying the essence of the gospel message. Paul's exhaustive labor and struggle for the church are fueled by this very presence of Christ within him, emphasizing that our efforts in ministry are sustained by divine power, not merely human strength.

Paul's message is timeless. It calls us to a higher standard of living, one marked by unity, love, and a deep, unwavering assurance in the truth of Christ. As we carry forward this stewardship, may we strive to follow Paul's dedication, knowing that our efforts are empowered by the very presence of Christ within us.

For Discussion

How does Paul's concept of stewardship in Colossians 1:26-27 shape our understanding of Christian responsibility and mission today?

What is the significance of the "mystery" that Paul talks about, and how does it contrast with the mysteries of pagan religions?

How does the idea of "Christ in you" influence your personal faith and daily life as a Christian?

What practical steps can we take to encourage and strengthen the hearts of fellow believers in our local church?

How can we foster a sense of being "knit together in love" within our church, especially in times of disagreement or conflict?

Paul emphasizes the goal of spiritual maturity. What does spiritual maturity look like in your own life, and how can we support each other in this growth?

Christ's energy fueled Paul's ministry. How do we tap into this divine power in our ministries and personal endeavors?

How does the hope of eternal glory impact our present actions and decisions? How can we keep this hope alive in our hearts?

Paul speaks about applying knowledge and wisdom. How can we better apply biblical wisdom to our everyday challenges and opportunities?

¹⁹ Galatians 2:20; Romans 8:10; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Ephesians 3:17.

²⁰ Bruce, F. F. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984, p. 86.

²¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Corinthians 4:14.

²² Thurston, Reading Colossians..., p. 32.

²³ Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon...*, p. 98.

²⁴ See Romans 15:4-5; 2 Corinthians 1:4, 6; 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 4:18; 5:14; 1 Corinthians 14:31. Paul would often send others to encourage local congregations personally. See Colossians 4:8 and Ephesians 6:22.

²⁵ Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon...*, p. 97.

²⁶ Barclay, William. *The Letters to Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. 3rd ed. fully rev. and updated. The New Daily Study Bible. Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003, p. 150.

²⁷ 2 Timothy 4:2; Galatians 6:1-2.

²⁸ In non-biblical Greek, *knit together* means "to cause to stride together." It carries the idea of reconciliation. See Delling, Gerhard. "Συμβιβάζω." Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-.

The writing of Herodotus is an example: "So when the Lydians and Medes saw the day turned to night, they stopped fighting, and both were the more eager to make peace. Those who reconciled them were Syennesis the Cilician and Labynetus the Babylonian." See Herodotus, *History*, 1.74.3. Herodotus. *Herodotus, with an English Translation by A. D. Godley*. Edited by A. D. Godley. Medford, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920.

²⁹ Schaeffer, Francis. *The Mark of the Christian*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1970, p. 15.

³⁰ McKnight, The Letter to the Colossians..., p. 209.

³¹ For similar usages and thoughts, see 1 Thessalonians 1:5; Colossians 4:12; 1 Corinthians 2:1-4; Romans 4:21; 8:15-16; 14:5; Hebrews 6:11; and 2 Timothy 4:17.

³² Barclay, William. *The Letters to...*, p. 151.

³³ Barclay, ... p. 151.