

Book of Colossians - Colossians 1:19-29

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Colossians 1:19-29²

The Deity and Reconciliation of Christ (Colossians 1:19-23)

Col 1:19 For it pleased [the Father that] in Him all the fullness should dwell (κατοικεσαι),

- ♦ **Fullness** - All the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily within Christ (Col. 2:9). The fullness of deity. The express image (charakter) of His person (Heb. 1:3), "the exact expression (the image) of any person or thing, marked likeness, precise reproduction in every respect."³
- ♦ **Not an Emanation** - The fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily within Christ. Christ is fully man and fully God. He is not an emanation or projection of God as the gnostics held. Nor is He a 'modality' of God. Identity - "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:8-9). Jesus revealed His glory at the Mount of Transfiguration (Mtt. 17:2, Jesus was μετεμορφώθη before them). Jesus is "the first and the last" and unmistakably identified as such in Rev. 1:17-18.
- ♦ **The Incarnation as revelation of God** - When Jesus "emptied Himself," it was not in relation to His deity, but to be found in the form of a servant and coming in the likeness of men (Php. 2:7). "No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son... He has declared (exegeomai, ek + hegeomai, to 'lead out' or 'relate' or 'explain') Him" (John 1:18).

Col 1:20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

- ♦ **Reconciliation by Christ** - To reconcile: "To reestablish a close relationship."⁴ The relationship man once had with God, but was marred by the entry of sin (Gen. 3:8). This separation was why man was driven from the Garden, the purpose behind the Tabernacle, the Temple, and the veil separating the Holy of Holies. Jesus opened a way for our approach back to God by tearing the veil (Mtt. 27:51) and providing 'a new and living way through the veil' (Heb. 10:19-20). Those who have not yet trusted in Christ have no reconciliation with God. Jesus is the only mediator between God and man (1Ti. 2:5). This reconciliation of Christ is the focus of our ministry as believers (2Cor. 5:18:21).
- ♦ **things on earth, things in heaven** - 'Much has been written on the meaning of this expression, and a

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2 New King James Bible. TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982.

3 James Strong, The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, electronic ed. (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996).

4 American Heritage Dictionary.

great variety of opinions have been entertained of it. It is best, always, unless necessity require a different interpretation, to take words in their usual signification. If that rule be adopted here, "things in heaven" will refer to God and the angels, and perhaps may include the principles of the Divine government. "Things on earth" will embrace men, and the various things on earth which are now at variance with God and with heaven. Between these, it is designed to produce harmony by the blood of the cross, or by the atonement. As in heaven nothing is wrong; as it is not desirable that anything should be changed there, all the change that is to take place, in order to produce reconciliation, is to be on the part of men and the things of this world.⁵ "Other, by things in heaven, do not understand the angels, but the saints departed; the patriarchs, prophets, and all the faithful now in heaven, or here on earth, they were all reconciled, in order to their being saved; intimating, that the blood of Christ did expiate the guilt of those persons who lived before him, as well as of those that died after him: He reconciled all things in heaven and earth, capable of reconciliation, appointed to it, and that stood in need of it."⁶ "BENGEL explains the reconciliation to be that of not only God, but also angels, estranged from men because of man's enmity against God. Eph 1:10 accords with this..."⁷ "If the phrase be not a kind of collective phrase to signify all the world, or all mankind, as Dr. Hammond supposed the things in heaven may refer, according to some, to those persons who died under the Old Testament dispensation, and who could not have a title to glory but through the sacrificial death of Christ: and the apostle may have intended these merely to show that without this sacrifice no human beings could be saved, not only those who were then on the earth, and to whom in their successive generations the Gospel should be preached, but even those who had died before the incarnation; and, as those of them that were faithful were now in a state of blessedness, they could not have arrived there but through the blood of the cross, for the blood of calves and goats could not take away sin."⁸ "all the elect of God are here meant, the family of God in heaven and in earth; all the saints that were then in heaven, when actual reconciliation was made by the blood of Christ, and who went thither upon the foot of peace, reconciliation, and redemption, to be made by his sacrifice and death; and all the chosen ones that were or should be on the face of the earth, until the end of time; all these were reconciled to God by Christ"⁹ "things in heaven - Those who are now in paradise; the saints who died before Christ came."¹⁰

- ◆ **Blood of His Cross** - The chastisement of our peace was upon Him (Isa. 53:5). Man's peace with God is only found through Jesus Christ (Acts 10:36; Rom. 5:1). The death of Jesus required the shedding of blood because it is blood which atones for sin (Heb. 9:22). The "life (nephesh) of the flesh is in

5 Albert Barnes

6 William Burkitt

7 Jameison, Fausset, Brown

8 Adam Clarke

9 John Gill

10 John Wesley

the blood" (Lev. 17:11). God made Christ's soul (nephesh) an offering for sin (Isa. 53:10). This is why it is Christ's blood which is the basis of the New Covenant (Mtt. 26:28).

Col 1:21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled

- ◆ **Alienated** - All men are born alienated from God due to sin. This is why we must be 'born again' for we enter the world spiritually dead (Joh 3:3; Joh 3:7; Ga 6:15; 1Pe 1:3; 1Pe 1:23; 1Jo 2:29; 1Jo 3:9; 1Jo 5:1; 1Jo 5:18). This alienation was especially true for the Gentiles who had no part in the promises God had made to Israel (Eph. 2:11-18).
- ◆ **Reconciled while Enemies** - This reconciliation was made while we were in opposition to God (Rom. 5:8-11).
- ◆ **Mind** - The mind and conscience of unbelievers is defiled, even though they profess to know God (1Ti. 1:15-16). Even "good works" done by nonbelievers fails to gain God's favor because the motives are flawed or the works serve as a substitute for God's only begotten Son. No matter what a person does, if they have not accepted Jesus, then their mind is opposed to God (Rom. 8:7; and they are subject to God's wrath (John 3:18, 36).
- ◆ **Wicked Works** - All of us participated in wicked works motivated by 'the desires of the flesh and of the mind' (Eph. 2:1-3).

Col 1:22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight--

- ◆ **His flesh through Death** - It is the cross, and only the cross which reconciles us to God. Christ's death on the cross bore the sin of many and made intercession for us, the transgressors (Isa. 53:12).
- ◆ **In His Sight** - We appear holy, blameless and above reproach in His sight. Not because of our own righteousness (we have none), but because of the "righteousness of God" which we obtain from Christ and which is laid to our account. Our perfection is "in Jesus Christ" (Col. 1:28). We will be presented 'faultless' before His presence (Jude 24). Many people say that Christianity is full of hypocrites. Perhaps that may be. But the issue isn't whether Christians are sinners (all men are), but how do they appear in His sight? Christian's have the imputed righteousness of Christ (Rom. 4:11, 16-25).

Col 1:23 if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

- ◆ **If you continue in the faith** - does this mean that a true believer can fall away? Many passages make it clear that believers are secure (John 5:24; John 6:39; John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:29-30; 2Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; Php. 1:6; 1Pe. 1:3-5; Jude 24). Those who 'fall away' only showed an external appearance of knowing Christ, but were never actually of His flock (John 7:21-23; 1Jo. 2:19). These were not foreknown (as an intimate acquaintance) by the Father. The predestination of

God makes no sense if those who are predestined and called can elude being justified and glorified (Rom. 8:30). From a divine perspective, our election is sure. But, from a human perspective, Paul is suggesting the need to be wary, grounded and steadfast - so as to avoid being as the seed sown where there was no depth of earth (Mtt. 13:6, 20-21). "This does not suggest that our perseverance secures our salvation. Scripture everywhere teaches precisely the opposite: God, as part of His saving work, secures our perseverance. True believers are "are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation" (1 Pet. 1:5). The guarantee of our perseverance is built into the New Covenant promise. God says: "I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me" (Jer. 32:40). Those who do fall away from Christ give conclusive proof that they were never truly believers to begin with (1 John 2:19). To say that God secures our perseverance is not to say that we are passive in the process, however. He keeps us "through faith" (1 Pet. 1:5)—our faith. Scripture sometimes calls us to hold fast to our faith (Heb. 10:23 ; Rev. 3:11) or warns us against falling away (Heb. 10:26-29). Such admonitions do not negate the many promises that true believers will persevere (John 10:28 , 29 ; Rom. 8:38 , 39 ; 1 Cor. 1:8 , 9 ; Phil. 1:6). Rather, the warnings and pleas are among the means God uses to secure our perseverance in the faith. Notice that the warnings and the promises often appear side by side. For example, when Jude urges believers, "keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21), he immediately points them to God, "who is able to keep you from stumbling" (Jude 24)."¹¹

The Mystery of the Church (Colossians 1:24-27)

Col 1:24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,

- ◆ **my sufferings** - Paul's imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:16, 30).
- ◆ **the afflictions of Christ** - Paul's afflictions on behalf of Christ, not Christ's afflictions which cannot be lacking in any way, being perfectly sufficient to atone for all men who come to faith. It is impossible for men to add to the perfect completed work of Christ (John 19:30; Heb. 10:10-14). To suggest otherwise is the height of blasphemy in that it denies the value of the sacrifice of God's only Son. This is the very reason that works play no part in obtaining salvation, being merely the fruit of true faith. "Christ's enemies had not gotten their fill of inflicting injury on Him. So they turned their hatred on those who preached the gospel (cf. John 15:18 , 24 ; 16:1-3). It was in that sense that Paul filled up what was lacking in Christ's affliction"¹² "it is a believer's privilege to suffer for Christ (2 Tim. 3:11 ; 1 Peter 3:13-14 ; 5:9 ; Heb. 10:32). The word "affliction" (thlipsis)—never used in the New Testament of Christ's death—means "distress," "pressure," or "trouble" (which Paul had plenty of; 2 Cor. 11:23-29). Ordinarily it refers to trials in life, not the pains of death. Christ does

11 MacArthur, John Jr. The MacArthur Study Bible. electronic ed., Mt 24:13. Nashville: Word Pub., 1997, c1997.

12 MacArthur

indeed continue to suffer when Christians suffer for Him"¹³ Note especially how Paul's persecution of believers was stated to be a persecution of Christ Himself (Acts 26:14). In this sense (only), the persecution of believers throughout history 'fills up' the afflictions which in the end will be heaped upon Christ and those that are His.

- ◆ **His body... the church** - The church is Christ's body ministering on earth in His absence. The church began on the day of Pentecost (Mtt. 16:18; Acts 2:47) and is made up of all those who have been born again and baptized by the Spirit into His body (1Cor. 12:13, see also 1Cor. 12:12-27). Christ is the head of His body (Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 2:19). History has shown time and again that a church which is disconnected from her head is in every sense a monster (e.g., the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition). Alas, these ugly chapters of church history are likely to recur in our own age when many are claiming to be of Christ, but have neither interest in His Word nor intention in following His commands.

Col 1:25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,

- ◆ **stewardship** - oikonomean from oikos (house) and nomos (law). Also known as "dispensation." The rules and guidelines by which God runs His "household" during an economy. Although God never changes, His "house rules" which He expects of man do. For example, prior to the flood, man was vegetarian. After the flood, he was permitted to eat food. Prior to Pentecost, Jews were forbidden to eat certain foods, later, all foods were permitted. Paul's specific stewardship (responsibility) involved making known the mystery associated with the creation and purpose of the church.

Col 1:26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.

- ◆ **mystery** - Paul defines mystery here in a way which directly conflicts with the notion of the Gnostics, and is still very popular among religious dabblers of our day. The Gnostic mystery is a deep truth which is only discernible to an elite few who attain a height of perception and insight into the mystery. Christian mystery is something previously (and entirely) hidden, but now revealed. Its revelation does not come from insider knowledge or deep philosophy, but by being made clear (εφανερώθη, made manifest) by God. God's mysteries cannot be attained by human means, but only as God decides to reveal what was previously hidden. The essential difference between Gnostic mystery and God-given revelation is the former builds ego and pride whereas the latter tears it down. Unlike the Gnostic idea of mystery, biblical mysteries are only made known when "God wills" to make them known (Col. 1:27).
- ◆ **Hidden from ages and generations** - Therefore, this mystery is a new revelation. The mystery in this sentence looks back to the phrase 'the church' (Col. 1:25) and forward to the explanation,

13 Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures, Col 1:24. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985.

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"Christ in you" (Col. 1:27). These are, in fact, one and the same. For it is the very indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the multitude of the redeemed since the day of Pentecost which is the very body of Christ. It was this very organism which Paul had persecuted which Jesus called 'Me' (Acts 9:4 ; cf. Gal. 1:13). Paul elaborates on the revelation of this mystery in his letter to the Ephesians (Eph. 3:1-7). "The mystery was not that Gentiles would be saved but how they could be "fellow-heirs" (Eph. 3:6 , KJV), on the same level with Jews, with no middle wall of partition between them (Eph. 2:12-14)."¹⁴

Col 1:27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

- ◆ **Among the Gentiles** - this mystery was of special significance to the Gentiles. Although the Old Testament is very clear that Gentiles will seek God and be blessed by God, there was always the expectation (as evidenced by the category of proselyte and God-fearer of the OT and the actions of the Jewish church in Acts) that Gentiles would participate in some sort of lesser role than that of the Jews. The idea that Gentiles would be on an absolutely equal par with Jews in one new man (Eph. 2:15) was both unknown and unexpected (Acts 10:45; 11:17-18): "A concordance examination of the word body indicates that the idea of a body into which redeemed people are placed is nowhere found in the Old Testament. The first occurrences of the word body in connection with the Body of Christ is in 1Co 12:12-25 and the next is in Ro 12:5. The remainder occur in Ephesians and Colossians. This further supports the truth that the mystery of the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the one Body of Christ was unknown and unrevealed in the Old Testament."¹⁵
- ◆ **Christ in you** - The Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit which Jesus had said was with the disciples, but would later be in them (John 14:17-23; 15:4-5). The coming of the Spirit on Pentecost to form this new spiritual organism, the church, was not previously revealed. The reality of "Christ in you" (2Cor. 13:5) did not take place until the Holy Spirit had been given (John 7:37-39; Acts 1:4-5).
- ◆ **hope of glory** - The giving of the Spirit to each believer at the time of faith is a down-payment, a guarantee of the glory which is to come (John 14:16; 2Cor. 1:22). He is the "Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13) by Whom we are sealed for the "day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30).

Perfect in Christ (Colossians 1:28-29)

Col 1:28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

- ◆ **Him we preach** - Christ and His cross are the focus of all truly fruitful preaching: "For I

¹⁴ Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures, Col 1:25. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985.

¹⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, Dispensationalism (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 134.

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determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." (1Cor. 2:2)

- ♦ **warning** - Many who we warn will not hear because the Word of God is a reproach to them (Jer. 6:10). Ezekiel bore a special responsibility toward Israel to give them God's warning (Eze. 3:17-21; 33:4-9). Paul applied this same principle to his own ministry (Acts 20:25-27). Warnings are delivered both to the unregenerate and to believers (1Cor. 4:14) for their edification.
- ♦ **teaching** - Warning emphasizes the perils of disobedience whereas teaching emphasizes the path toward pleasing God. Modern-day Christianity places little emphasis on the use of our mind and on teaching, but the NT indicates that our understanding plays an important role in being conformed into the image of Christ. We are transformed by the renewing of our mind (Rom. 12:2). Our job is not to make converts, but to make disciples - those who are taught "to observe all things that I [Jesus] have commanded you" (Mtt. 28:20). Christianity which is based solely on emotional experience is not true Christianity. We are to love God with all our mind in addition to the rest of our being (Mtt. 22:37).
- ♦ **Perfect in Christ** - The only absolute perfection that can be attained by man is in Christ. That is, having Christ's righteousness laid to our account to make us complete and spotless before the gaze of the Father. When we are in Christ, we are no longer lacking, but complete. Those who are outside of Christ who strive to be found "good enough" before God will be sorely disappointed to find that God does not grade on a relative scale. Absolute perfection is His requirement. This is why Christ is the only way to reconciliation with God. We must be written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 20:12). This word (teleion) can also carry the idea of being "complete" or "finished" as in being brought to full maturity.

Col 1:29 To this [end] I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

- ♦ **Striving** - "(agōnizomenos; cf. Col. 2:1 ; 4:12) or agonizing like an athlete in an arena (cf. 1 Cor. 9:25 ; 1 Tim. 6:12). The power for this struggle came from Christ (cf. Phil. 4:13)."¹⁶
- ♦ **According to His working** - Many of us strive, but are we striving according to His working which works in me? Or are we motivated and energized by our own goals and flesh? Jesus said that apart from Him we could do nothing (John 15:5). Paul recognized the power source of his labor was not his own, but of God (Php. 2:13; 1Cor. 15:10). Labor "in the flesh" is sin and results in long-term consequences which may be impossible to undo. (Abraham produced a son by his own devices with Hagar resulting in the line of Ishmael. God refused to recognize Abraham's handiwork as the promised son Gen. 17:18-21; 22:2). The ramification of Abraham's fleshly striving have plagued the Jews throughout history.)

16 Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures, Col 1:28. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985.