

98-09-11b Colossians

We're back now from our break and ready to resume our study in Colossians chapter 1. And just as we formally leave the subject of the body of Christ, let me review just a couple of passages with you. The concept of the body of Christ is used, or the term is used in two different ways. One, to refer to Christ's actual physical existence here on the earth.

When he talks about his flesh or suffering in the flesh, Jesus learned obedience through suffering, we are told. Obviously it's a reference to his actual physical body that was crucified on the cross. It's also used corporately for us as believers in this age.

And it's interesting, sometimes there are surprises that you encounter along the way. I remember once, and the only reason I will mention a specific denominator is because I was quite surprised one day. After having been a Baptist for years and years and years and years, I found a copy of the Statement of Faith of the Southern Baptist Convention in a pew one Sunday.

In the hymnal holder there, right next to the little holes where you put your communion cups afterward on the back of the pew there. And so I picked up the Statement of Faith, which I still have, it's the only one I've ever seen. But I opened it up and I was reading along and I was quite surprised and shocked to discover that the idea in the formal Statement of Faith of the Southern Baptist Convention is that all believers of every age are the church.

That Old Testament believers, everybody is in the church, everybody is in the body of Christ. All believers have been entered into the body of Christ. And just in case anybody has somehow accumulated that particular point of view, it's not correct.

The destiny of believers in this age, from Pentecost to the rapture, is unique. And only believers in this age are body of Christ, bride of Christ, and the church proper of which Christ is the head. Old Testament saints have a separate set of promises, a separate covenant, a different fate, a different part in God's plan.

It doesn't necessarily imply inferiority, but it may imply service. And the reason we say that is because of the constant theme in the Bible, the elder shall serve the younger. And it does not mean that there is anything inherently wrong in service.

As we're going to see, Paul is a servant of the gospel and it is an honorable calling and one that the apostles fulfilled in a unique way that we cannot. And so there is a service role in many areas of life, many different types of relationships. And it is by no means a deprecating statement to say that you are a servant or that you are serving.

It doesn't have to be a bad thing at all, but it is obviously different. And the most obvious example of this is to look at your military service where you have enlisted and you have officers. And there's a sense in which everyone is serving under the structure of our government and so forth.

But you have those who give orders and you have those who carry out orders. And there is no way that you can infer from any of that that one person is qualitatively superior or inferior to another. They're simply carrying out different roles.

Both roles are necessary. You have to have somebody thinking deep thoughts and dreaming up these orders. Hopefully they're meaningful and accomplish a purpose.

And you have to have other people who are not only willing but also creative and energetic in the carrying out of orders. And there is a command issued and an aye-aye, sir, that's given and these things take place. But it would be silly to say, well, I'm somehow inferior.

In fact, if you talk to enlisted people, they will uniformly carry the belief that they are superior to all of the officers that give them the orders that they receive. And it may, in fact, be true. But the point here is that Israel has a separate and distinct place in God's plan as a nation, as a body of believers, and they are not the church.

And the church is not Israel. It's one of the fundamental distinctions that falls under the heading of dispensationalism. To understand the dispensations is to find and respect that distinction in Scripture.

So when we talk about the body of Christ in the corporate sense as referring to believers, this is what we're talking about. The body of Christ in the corporate sense defines that group of believers from Pentecost to the rapture. It does not include tribulational saints.

It does not include those who died in faith prior to Pentecost. If you want to slice it very fine, it does not even include some believers who died after Pentecost who were believers in the Old Testament sense that never did make the leap necessary to become New Testament saints. And that, of course, is a study unto itself.

But being in the body of Christ as church-age believers does a couple of things. And this is just a real quick couple of observations. It unites us to each other.

Remember, body of Christ, whenever we find the term, is an emphasis on the earthly aspects of Jesus' work on the cross, on his existence as the God-man, as the hypostatic union. What are the earthward effects? What are the effects in our realm? It unites us to each other in a unique way, just as being a member of the nation, being a citizen of the nation of Israel, united them as Israelites, as the children of Israel. Even those who were Hittites and other sorts of Ites, the mixed multitude that came, they were incorporated into the nation and that bound them together.

They treated each other differently within the nation than they did outside. There were a different set of rules in the Levitical code for those who were in Israel as opposed to the foreigner and the stranger and the sojourner among you. They treated them differently, so they were bound together.

We are united to each other. You can turn to 1 Corinthians 10 and verse 16 to find a fairly unique statement of this. 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 16, you have the discussion of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile. You are still in your sins.

Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. So a lot depends on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because we are in Him, we are guaranteed of resurrection in the future.

That is a part of the hope, our confident expectation that binds us together as one. We have that as a common expectation. Regardless of whether or not we are spotless, blameless, and above reproach, regardless of any other factor of success or failure in life, we are in Christ and we will be raised just as He was raised.

Our fate is the same as His. If you go down to verse 20, Christ is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Verse 22, as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

Good, bad, or ugly, if you are in Christ, you will be made alive in the physical sense. Physical resurrection, each in his own order. Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

This particular statement of chronology in verses 23 and following is strictly from a church age standpoint. It doesn't mention the resurrection of the Old Testament saints. It doesn't mention the resurrection of the unbelievers at the great white throne.

It says Christ is the firstfruits, those who are Christ's at His coming. Then he jumps all the way to the end when the millennial kingdom is turned over to God the Father. And the enemy of death is put to rest once and for all.

It's strictly from a church age perspective. Let's come back a few pages to 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and look at verses 3 and following. He's talking about spiritual gifts.

He says I don't want you to be ignorant. You know that you were Gentiles carried away to dumb idols however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed.

And no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. There are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit. There are diversities of ministries but the same Lord.

There are diversities of activities but it is the same God who works all in all. The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. And it gives different gifts that are given for

different workings and different ministries and so forth.

And in verse 11, one and the same Spirit works all these things distributing to each one individually as He wills. We are united in the body of Christ for fellowship. We're united in the body of Christ for function.

God the Holy Spirit operates in us to minister to each other. And we like to look at lists and get labels and names for different gifts. And well this one's got the gift of helps and this one's got the gift of pastor or teacher or both.

Or this one's got the gift of evangelist or this one's got the gift of whatever. But there are diversities of gifts. There are many more gifts than what Scripture lists.

It's the operation of the Holy Spirit in you in such a way as to benefit other believers. That's your spiritual gift. It's not a gift in the sense that well here's a tidy little definition and a job description and an arena of operation.

Essentially what this passage tells us is anytime God the Holy Spirit operates in and through you to be a blessing to another believer, congratulations. You have just functioned in your spiritual gift. You have given forth the fruit of the Spirit.

When you are with other believers and you function in love, joy, peace, patience, it's amazing. You can be bearing the fruit of the Spirit and be a blessing and be ministering a gift in the body of Christ when you're around an obnoxious believer and you're just patient. You don't get angry.

You don't get bitter. You don't start thinking dark retaliatory thoughts. You don't allow a root of bitterness to spring up.

You look on the things that are good and noble and pure and lovely and right. You concentrate on things that build up and not on things that tear down. You are long-suffering and gentle and bear with and you speak the truth in love and you don't get acrimonious and you don't give off mental attitude sins.

Guess what? You have just exercised spiritual gifting. You have just borne the fruit of the Spirit and you have pleased God in so doing. We often think that, well, the operation of my spiritual gift, there's going to be some tangible result that I'll be able to see.

I will exercise the gift of administration and here will be a little tangible result. I will share the Gospel or I'll teach the Word of God or I will do this, I'll do that, I'll do the other. Then I'll know that this is my unique and special area of gifting that God the Holy Spirit has given me and this will be its little formal area of function.

We missed a point. If you meditate on this passage for a while, Paul says, I don't want you to be ignorant about spiritual gift. Really, gift is not a great translation for this Greek word.

It's a very difficult word to render into English. If it was easy to do, somebody would have done it. Gift isn't really the idea.

It's not like a little box with wrapping on it and a ribbon and a tag. Here's your little thing to take and go play with. It has more the idea of this is the, well, it just isn't easy to render into English.

People have tried it. They're big, long articles. The best I can do in a short space of time is to say that this, in fact, you'll notice if you look at 12.1 here in 1 Corinthians, it says now concerning spiritual and the word gift is in italics because the word for gift in Greek isn't even there.

It's really, if you rendered this literally into English, it says now concerning spirituals. It has the idea of operation in the spiritual realm, manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit, things that take place with regard to the Spirit, manifestation or operation in the Spirit, of the Spirit, by the Spirit, through the Spirit. It's just a difficult thing to render, so they've just said, well, it's a spiritual gift.

But the word gift isn't really even there. But Paul says, I don't want you to be ignorant about it. But there is one Spirit of God, and He is consistent.

There are diversities of gifts in verse 4, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. There are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

So being in the body of Christ, being energized by the Spirit of God in that body, it's mirrored in our individual lives. We can be the dwelling place, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the dwelling place for God the Father and God the Son in our flesh. In a larger sense, the body of Christ, corporately composed of all believers, should be operating as one, a single body indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the dwelling place for God the Father and God the Son, and operating in such a way as to reflect His glory.

It's important, especially when you start thinking about those problem times, when we're in an environment of other believers where that sounds good on paper, but it's not so easy to do. When conversations come up that seem to always devolve or steer off into bad directions, or when it's hard to be patient, and it's hard to be full of love, joy, peace, patience, and so forth. That's the time to remember that it is God's desire for us to function without schism, without division, without rancor.

You can imagine what would happen if the parts of your body got mad at each other and just started separating and falling apart. It would be a disaster for us. We don't want to cut off circulation.

We don't want to have parts that don't work in coordination. I was driving home the other day and saw a little Oriental lady walking home, down there just off Gaston Avenue. It was obvious to me from her age and from her movements that she probably had polio as a child.

There are still people from that generation who had polio and spent their life in a state where they have all of their body parts. Their bodies are whole in the sense of everything being there, but in walking there you see the fact that things don't work right. They don't work together in a smooth fashion.

The movement of her legs as she used her cane and went across the street was very awkward and unnatural. The knees didn't bend quite right and the legs didn't move in quite the right direction. She was able to move and able to go from one place to another.

You think, oh, how sad that the body isn't working in the grace and rhythm that God designed for it. How much more so in the body of Christ when we as believers are not able to function in harmony and in smooth cooperation guided and empowered by that one spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. When we tend to focus on our differences instead of our, and I'm not for pan world peace and one world church and so forth, but there is a real sense, especially in our individual relationships where we need to take to heart the encouragement of Scripture to focus on the things that are good and lovely and noble and right and not constantly make issues out of things that are divisive and not helpful.

Even when it is time to separate, even when it is time to put some distance between ourselves and another believer, it should never be done with a lack of love or a lack of peace or a lack of patience. If we catch ourselves having the symptoms of mental attitude sin, we need to really examine closely why we're doing what we're doing. Are we separating because we're fed up and we're out of patience and we're not willing to forbear, we're not willing to do good to those who hate us and we're using a sort of a scriptural excuse to separate or are we doing it out of an objective realization that to continue association is only going to be degenerative and harmful rather than edifying and building up.

Are we doing these things because we're seeking the good of the body of Christ or are we doing it because we're seeking our own personal relief perhaps. And so when we think about the body of Christ, it unites us. It unites us for fellowship, it unites us for function, it unites us for service, it unites us to reflect the glory of Jesus Christ and those should be our priorities, whether we associate or whether we separate.

It has to be for the goal of what is best in terms of the reflection of the glory of Christ. You can see in Romans chapter 12 verses 3 through 5 another expression of this unity in the body. Romans 12, 3, I say through the grace given to me to everyone who is among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them. If prophecy, let us

prophecy in proportion to our faith.

For ministry, let us use it in our ministering. He who teaches in teaching, he who exhorts in exhortation, he who gives with liberality, he who leads with diligence, he who shows mercy with cheerfulness. This, by the way, when you go and do some sort of a formal study of spiritual gifts, they hardly ever come to this passage, but this is another great listing of the type of thing that takes place under the ministry of the Spirit.

Showing mercy is a spiritual gift. Leading is a spiritual gift. Exhortation or ministry or prophecy, the communication of scriptural truth, all of these things are additional manifestations of spiritual gifting.

The picture of the body of Christ is also invoked by Paul in Ephesians 5.30, which is the last passage I'll commend to your attention in this regard. Ephesians 5.30 is a fairly well-known section of scripture to us. In the exhortations to various categories of people, we get to the section beginning in verse 22 of wives and husbands.

Paul says in verse 28, Husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.

Right there at the end of verse 29, you have that picture. Jesus Christ cherishes the church because it's his own flesh, it's his body. You have the link here that bridges the gap between the physical body of Christ that he walked around in here on earth and the corporate body of Christ that we now represent.

For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. Why do you think that reference to bones is in there? Wouldn't it be enough to say we are members of his body and just put a period? He says of his flesh and of his bones. Well, it's an allusion.

Remember when you allude to something? Not illusion, starting with an I, but allusion starting with an A. This is an allusion all the way back to Genesis. What does Adam say when God presents him with the results of his work with the rib while Adam was asleep? This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman for she came out of man.

She's intimately linked. She is a part of the man. Paul is making that argument here that you don't hate your own flesh and the wife is in fact the own flesh, if you will, of the husband.

At the church, we are in fact members of his body. That's why he states here of his flesh and of his bones. We are the Eve to the last Adam.

Then he goes on to quote that passage from Genesis 2. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. We are linked in this way as the corporate body of Christ to the literal body of Christ. He says this is a great

mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

That really is his main point. So the body of Christ as an emphasis on the earthward or human oriented aspects of the work of Christ on the cross is really an important concept to keep in mind. Keep an eye out as you encounter these in your studies of Scripture when you come across references to the blood of Christ or the body of Christ that there is quite a bit of meaning attached to those terms.

So returning now to Colossians and our personalization of this message by Paul beginning in verse 24, we've seen that thus far in chapter 1 Paul uses the plural. He says in chapter 1 verse 3, we give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The praying here in verse 3 is the first person plural.

In verse 4, we heard of your faith and so forth. In verse 7, our dear fellow servant, Epaphras, who declared to us your love in the spirit. Paul has been speaking in the plural all through the early portion of chapter 1. But beginning in verse 23, he starts speaking in the singular.

He says this gospel which was preached to every creature under heaven of which I, Paul, became a ministry. He could easily have just stayed in the first person plural and said we're all ministers of the gospel, aren't we? We're all under the great commission of which we have become ministers. But he makes a point of shifting here to the first person singular and there's a reason.

Because now Paul is speaking from the standpoint of his apostleship and there are in fact several unique facets of apostleship that we can see just in these next few verses. Notice verse 24. He has said, I, Paul, have become a minister of this gospel.

He says, 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. Hopefully you can begin to see some of the connections here to the foundation we've laid in our preceding verses. Paul says, I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.

And you say, whoa, that's kind of a dangerous statement. I wouldn't go out and say, well, there was something lacking in the afflictions of Christ. It looked to me like his afflictions were pretty complete and certainly satisfied the requirements that God the Father had for the mission of Christ on earth.

What can Paul be talking about here? That there's something lacking in the afflictions of Christ. Well, this is where our foundation is going to help us out. He goes on to repeat in verse 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, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and generations but has now revealed to his saints.

There are four or five unique things here that relate to Paul's apostleship. One of the first ones is when Paul says, I now rejoice in my sufferings for you. There is a commission from Jesus Christ to the original twelve apostles, the one that we noted earlier, who describes himself as being born out of time.

He's given his commission separately, but he is equally qualified. He's fully commissioned, fully identified, fully manifested as an apostle. But Jesus talked about the unique functions, the unique identity that the apostles would have and we want to look at just a couple of those because one of them is what Paul describes here, suffering on behalf of the church.

Apostles were called and had the function of suffering on behalf of the church in a unique way. This isn't on behalf of the gospel, is it? It's on behalf of the church. Suffering on behalf of the church.

Suffering on behalf of the body of Christ. This is not the same as being a proponent of the gospel and suffering in that capacity. Paul talks about that in his epistles.

He talks about if you're a believer in Christ, you're blessed and so forth. All of us, your average believers like you and I, when he says you can suffer for the sake of Christ and there's a great blessing attached to that. This is suffering on behalf of the church.

Now can one or more of us suffer on behalf of the church at large? Not in this sense. This is an apostolic function that is unique to the apostles. Peter suffered uniquely on behalf of the church, as did John and Paul and the other apostles to a greater or lesser extent.

And Jesus told them that they would. Turn back with me to Matthew chapter 20, one of those really interesting passages that is more interesting the longer you look at it. You have, beginning in verse 20, the mother of Zebedee's sons.

Who are the sons of Zebedee? You have James and John, sons of Thunder, sons of Zebedee. The mother of Zebedee's sons came to him, came to Jesus, with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from him. He said to her, What do you wish? She said to him, Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand and the other on the left, in your kingdom.

But Jesus answered and said, You do not know what you ask. And then apparently he's turning to James and John. He does not address this question to their mother.

He says, Are you, and this is you in the plural here, are you too able to drink the cup that I am about to drink and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? Now depending on the text that you have in front of you, you may not have that baptism section. But if you go over to Mark, I believe it's Mark chapter 10, that's where this comes from. In the Mark passage, it's clearly there in the original.

But this is in fact what Jesus said on this occasion. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? What do you think of when you think of drinking the cup in this context? We know we have the cup of the Lord's table and so forth. But this is the cup of judgment, isn't it? What does Jesus say in the garden? Father, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done. The cup is an emblem or a symbol of the coming trial, the coming judgment of God, and the suffering that Jesus will undergo in his work on the cross. So he says, are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink? Remember this is Matthew chapter 20, and you've got the crucifixion coming up just a chapter or two hence.

Are you able to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? You find another reference to that baptism over in Luke where Jesus says, I have come to bring fire on the earth and I wish that the flame was already lit. He says, I long to be baptized with the baptism that's coming to me. But this idea of drinking the cup, he says, he asks James and John about this.

James and John are disciples at this point, soon to be apostles. And it is a requirement in order to sit at the right and left hand of Jesus to apparently, when he asks this question, to partake of this cup, this cup of suffering, the cup that Jesus is about to drink, that he prays about in the garden, is the cup of judgment, the cup of suffering on behalf of the world and for sins. In verse 23 he says, you will indeed drink my cup and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with, but to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give.

It is for those for whom it is prepared by my Father. That is a reward for certain individuals and God the Father will decide who receives that privilege. But he says, you will indeed drink my cup and you will indeed be baptized with my baptism.

He says this to James and John. So there is in that picture of drinking the cup and sharing the baptism, a picture of sharing the suffering of Christ. And he speaks these words to two men who are in fact disciples slash apostles.

So we have here a unique function, a unique calling to share the suffering of Christ. There are other passages that we can go to where Jesus is describing to the disciples what they will suffer at the hands of men for the sake of his testimony. He says, you will be witnesses, you will stand before kings, they will scourge you, they will imprison you, they will do this, that and the other to you for my sake.

And they will share much of the physical suffering that Jesus is going to undergo when he is imprisoned, he is scourged, he is indeed put to death for his testimony with regard to the things of God. And this is uniquely a part of the commission of an apostle. This is why Paul can say in Colossians 1.24, I rejoice in my sufferings for you.

Paul says, in my role as an apostle. Nowhere in the writings of Paul, which are quite extensive in

the New Testament, does he ever call on others and say, suffer as you have seen me suffer. He details his own sufferings of shipwreck, imprisonment, torture, beatings, and all of the other things that he goes through on behalf of the church.

There are many passages that attest to this, at least three major passages in Acts and in the epistles. But he never calls on other believers and says, this is a part of your calling to suffer on behalf of the church. These are things that Paul engages in as an apostle on behalf of the body of Christ.

And this is the sense in which the sufferings of Christ on behalf of the church are shared by the twelve apostles. They are eyewitnesses. They are the twelve commissioned eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ.

They are not the only eyewitnesses, but they are the only commissioned eyewitnesses. They are the recipients of Matthew 28, 19, and 20 to make disciples. They are the recipients of the commission to teach disciples to observe all the things that Jesus has taught them.

And they do so through their personal ministry and through the process of recording inspired scripture. Notice all of the things that are unique to Paul in this case and why he switches to the singular. He says, I rejoice in my sufferings for you.

I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ. These are the afflictions of the body of Christ. And in the same way that Jesus bore our suffering so that we did not have to, by his stripes we are healed, there is an extension of that in the example of the apostles.

They suffer in a unique way completing the suffering that Jesus Christ did. It sounds strange to our ears to think of this, well, Christ didn't suffer enough. All this means is that a part of the commission, a part of the eyewitness testimony function that the apostles had involved suffering on behalf of the entire church in order to be the pioneers of the gospel, to preach the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world.

Breaking that new ground, they would suffer uniquely, much as Christ suffered. And it is on behalf of the entire church, the church in every generation. We still benefit today from Paul's faithfulness under the pressure of the suffering that he underwent in a unique way as an apostle.

So he fills up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, the first generation of pushing the gospel forward, not only to Israel but also to the Gentiles. He fills that up for the sake of his body, which is the church. He says, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you.

This is his apostolic call. You go back to the Damascus Road and the divine revelation that is given not only to him but also to the individuals who receive him in his blindness and get him started on the way the way of Christian truth and function to fulfill the word of God. And he is a

steward of the mystery.

The mystery is revealed to Paul in a unique way. He's caught up to the third heaven. He is taught personally by the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know this when he says, I pass on to you what the Lord taught me about the Lord's table over in 1 Corinthians 7. He says, I pass on to you what I received from the Lord. He was directly taught by the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that he was caught up to the third heaven and saw things that he's not even allowed to reveal.

But he is commissioned to reveal the mystery. And Paul is in fact the apostle of the mystery more so than Peter or John or any of the other apostles. He reveals the truth of Christ in you, the hope of glory.

And all of these things that he details in verse 24, 25, and 26 are related to his apostleship. It is for the benefit of the body of Christ. He suffers affliction, persecution, imprisonment, beatings, shipwreck, and all of these other things to get this truth out to us.

Once it is inscripturated, once under the ministry of God and the Holy Spirit, he writes these letters and it's distributed out to the church, we don't have to suffer the way that he did. He shares the afflictions of Christ on our behalf. He fills up what is lacking.

Jesus Christ didn't stay on this earth to go and propagate the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the outermost parts of the earth. He commissioned the apostles to do that and they accomplished that within one generation. The mystery or the content that Paul has become a minister of is given here in verse 26.

It's the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations but now has been revealed to his saints. And this is a fascinating clue. It's one of the great passages to come to when we compare the Old Testament age and the New.

When we compare life under the law to life under grace. Life as an Old Testament saint, life as a New Testament believer in the body of Christ. What is possible now that was not possible before? What has been revealed now that was hidden in ages past? It is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Christ in you wasn't a possibility in the Old Testament age. This particular hope of glory was hidden and it certainly was not available to Gentiles. But because of the reconciliation that he has detailed in the earlier verses, because of the work of Jesus Christ that has made the body of Christ and being identified and becoming a part of the body of Christ in this age, this is now a possibility to have Christ in us.

And this is a wonderful subject to dwell on and this is where we will begin next week. But in closing, as we think about the transition from looking at Jesus Christ to looking at what it means

to us, this is something that we want to try to do on a daily basis ourselves. It's so easy to get wrapped up in the common places of life and lose sight of who we are in Christ.

It's Paul's purpose here to remind the Colossian believers and by extension to remind all of us in the body of Christ that that's who we are and that's why we're here. It's something we don't want to lose sight of. Losing sight of our hope, losing sight of our identity in Christ is the first step in the road that leads to deception, that leads to deflection, that leads to distraction, that leads to being neutralized as far as our opportunity and our calling in Christ.

This is what is in danger of happening in Colossae and in the Lycus Valley, that these false teachers who are bringing in alternative ways of thinking, how can they make this fly? How can they gain a foothold or gain anyone's attention with these alternate philosophies? It's because believers have lost sight of their hope. They've lost their confidence and their continuity in the faith because they've lost the perspective of who they are in Jesus Christ. We don't want that to happen to us.

Standing before God spotless, blameless, and above reproach is a real opportunity for us. It's not just a possibility. It's a very real and distinct opportunity.

It is our calling. It's our mandate. It defines us as believers in the church age.

We are body of Christ. We are bride of Christ. We are the Eve for the last Adam.

To lose sight of that, to be distracted from that, is to run the risk of being greatly deflected and greatly deceived, as we'll see as we continue through these passages. Let's close here in prayer. We thank you, Father, for the standing that we do have in Jesus Christ.

What a privilege it is to live in this age and to have the opportunities and the resources at our disposal that you have provided us through our Savior. We pray that we will be constantly aware of these things, even as we go about the day-to-day activities and tasks and duties that we are called upon to perform and engage in. We pray that through the ministry of the Spirit and the presence of your Word in our souls, we'll be constantly reminded that these are exercises.

They are opportunities for faith. They are opportunities to practice discernment of the better things, discerning between good and evil, discerning those things that are a part of your eternal purpose for us. We pray that in all things our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be glorified.

We pray these things in His name. Amen.