

98-10-02b Colossians

We're back now from our break, and we're continuing our study of this concept that Paul introduces as a part of his apostolic ministry in Colossians chapter 1, and that is Christ in you the hope of glory. We have established, or at least proposed, that this is not the personal presence of Jesus Christ, and there are reasons for that. And a lot of this is accommodation.

We don't understand how somebody can be everywhere at once. There is a sense in which God is everywhere, he's omnipresent, and yet he is also particularly present on his throne in the third heaven. Jesus Christ is God and in that sense is omnipresent, but we know that he was on the cross and that he died on the cross.

We know that his body was in the tomb. We know that he as a baby lay in the manger. So we have to work with the level of understanding that we can cope with, but the personal presence of Jesus Christ, because he is the God-man, and because his human component has a finite presence, he is seated at the right hand of the Father.

So there is a sense in which he is going to indwell us, but as we'll see when we look at the scriptures, it's not going to be necessarily the personal presence. And this is helpful because we need to understand the nature of our prayer life, to whom do we speak, to whom do we turn for guidance, and there's a reason why Jesus told the disciples, I am going away, I will send you another comforter. Jesus told them, he is with you and he will be in you.

The reason he said that is that on the day that Jesus was speaking those words, it was the last few days of the age of Israel, and in the Old Testament age, before the mystery was revealed that Paul is talking about here, even the ministry of the Holy Spirit was different. He could be with people, but he did not indwell believers as a rule. He could indue them, he could come upon them, he could fill them in certain situations.

The tabernacle workmen, the kings of Israel and others are said to have been filled with the Spirit, the judges, Samson and so on. But this was a momentary filling, or at least a filling at a particular occasion for a particular purpose. It wasn't a constant, it wasn't an everyday routine accompanying presence in most cases.

So Jesus tells the disciples who are still living in that age, this is before his death on the cross, he says the Holy Spirit is with you, he will be in you, and that's a prediction of what's going to happen after the cross and after the resurrection and ascension in the age where we are. There are so many things we take for granted. When I was a second lieutenant and first started traveling abroad and going overseas to countries like Thailand and the Philippines and Hong Kong and so forth, I didn't realize, because I had always been an American, I'd always lived in America and we weren't necessarily wealthy, but we weren't impoverished either, but I knew what a store was, I knew what malls were just coming into play in my later youth, I knew about government and

freedom and garbage men who come and pick up the trash and so forth.

We just have a whole environment here in our country that we grow up in and are used to. I had read and heard and seen on TV occasionally that things weren't the same in other countries, but when you go there and live for days and weeks and in some cases months and see people whose daily life is radically different from your own, they can't take any of those things for granted. When they go to the market, there hasn't been a USDA making sure that there was health inspection and that the meat is disease free and so forth.

I was in a town in the Philippines the night that a man was shot in the back by the police because he ran away. They didn't know why he was running, but he ran and they had almost martial law at that particular point and when he ran away, the M-16s went rat-a-tat-a-tat and we went over there to see what had happened and they had shot him dead in the street. We don't typically, there are people who would argue otherwise, minority groups and so forth, but generally speaking you don't see people shot dead on your sidewalks in America, but other countries, we take it for granted that what we have is sort of the same everywhere.

People used to say, well, the Russians must be people just like us, they're a big superpower and until you read books or went over and visited, you could see how radically different their society and their culture. That's the reason capitalism and free enterprise is failing over there, the mindset is so different and the history and the culture is so different that it takes a lot of work to get this sort of a system working in that sort of an environment and people over here can't understand it. I wonder why Yeltsin couldn't get all those reforms.

Well, it's just way different. The same thing is true for us as believers today. We take it for granted that we have the ministry of God, the Holy Spirit, that we can pray to God anytime we feel like it, that we don't have to be on our face in the dust, in sackcloth and ashes, that God isn't going to appear and slay us where we stand, that we just take these things for granted.

We're comfortable, we're relaxed, we toss a prayer up when we're in trouble or when we're feeling good or whatever. We don't have an awe or a reverence the way they did in the Old Testament. We just take all of these things for granted.

We literally rush in where angels fear to tread because we always have and it's the only thing we've known, but this is very, very different. It's a different age. The people who were present at the transition from one age to another couldn't hardly wrap their minds around it.

That's why the first generation in the church, the Jewish Christians, had such a hard time turning loose of the law of Moses and believing that you could let the Gentiles come into the church and they didn't have to sacrifice and they didn't have to avoid eating pork and they didn't have to be circumcised, they didn't have to do any of the things that these people had just grown up taking for granted as a part of the plan of God. It was such a radical change. We've lost the sense of that change.

We don't realize what privileges we enjoy because we're in Christ, but this is what we have in this age. So when it talks about the personal presence of God in our life, that's God the Holy Spirit. He personally indwells us and seals us and fills us and gifts us.

He is the personal presence at work in us to will and to do God's purpose. Jesus sent him for that purpose. I will send you another comforter.

He will speak to you. Jesus never said after I go away I'm going to speak to you. He said the Holy Spirit will not speak anything out of his own mind.

He will take the things that belong to me and he will communicate them to you. So the personal communication that we receive from God, the enablement to understand the word of God and to see the meaning of it in our lives comes to us through the personal ministry of God the Holy Spirit and that's why he's here. If we had the personal presence of Jesus Christ the way the disciples did, we wouldn't need the Holy Spirit because we would have Christ right there.

So there's a reason for the ministry of the Spirit and there's a reason why Christ is where he is. He is having his conversations with the Father on our behalf. The Holy Spirit is having conversations with us on behalf of the Father.

And God in his three persons, he has constructed the link between himself and us. And so you have God the Father in heaven, you have Jesus Christ who has bridged that gap and who has sent us a comforter and Jesus said I am going away to prepare a place for you and if I go, this is John 14, I will come again and receive you to myself so that where I am there you may be also. Now that's a pretty big piece of evidence for our understanding because if Jesus is coming and dwelling within us personally, then he already is where we are and he really doesn't need to go prepare any kind of a place but he specifically said I'm going away to prepare a place for you.

He says in my Father's house there's many dwelling places. If it wasn't so I would have told you but there are. There are many dwelling places.

There are dwelling places for angels of various ranks. There is a dwelling place for God. There's a dwelling place for Jesus Christ himself and he says I'm going to go prepare a dwelling place for you.

Right now when Jesus is talking to the disciples in John 14, there's no dwelling place for man in the heavenly realms. There's no dwelling place in the realms where God is and where the angels are. He says there are many dwelling places but I've got to go prepare a place for you so that where I am you can be there also.

Right now it's not prepared. There's no place. So I'm going to go do that and if I go I will come again and receive you to myself so that where I am you can be also.

So this tells us that Jesus is not co-located with us, he is elsewhere performing those tasks and awaiting the will of the Father to return and come get us. And yet we have, we keep returning to this idea of Christ in you. So what does that mean? Well let's take a look at what the scriptures say in this regard.

Look at Galatians chapter 4 and verse 19. This once again is Paul speaking to the Galatians. You remember the Galatian church? This is one like what we mentioned a few minutes ago.

There were a lot of Jews in this church, people who had come from a Jewish background and believed in the law and so forth. They had come to faith in Christ, they recognized that he was the Savior, but they were having a tough time turning loose of the law. And people who were interested in the law and so forth came in and said, well all this believing in Christ, that's fine, but don't set aside the law, the good old traditions and the things that we've always done.

And so Paul has to write to the Galatians and he says, look, if you don't come to an understanding that this is a new deal and that the old things have passed away, you're in danger of losing everything that you've gained. Look at chapter 5 in Galatians. Stand fast in the freedom by which Christ has made us free.

Do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. We tend to look at this and think, well those poor Christians in the first generation of the church, they got entangled in a yoke of bondage, the Judaizers and so forth, but that was then, we're not in any danger of that now. We are in that yoke of bondage as a church today because what is that yoke? It says I can please God and the standard of how pleasing I am to God is what I do.

If I perform certain actions, if I adhere to certain rules, then God will be pleased. That's what Judaism is. If I eat certain things, if I wear certain things, if I do certain things on Saturday and refrain from doing certain things on Saturday, God will be pleased.

I'll follow these rules and I'm good to go with God. Well do we have that kind of thinking today? All over the place and it's such a terrible misunderstanding that there's been a change. This new mystery that wasn't revealed before is a different standard of measure.

God isn't interested in what we do. He's not interested and that's why there's no rules. People that run churches say, well what are God's rules for setting up a church? How many deacons? How many elders? Pastor? Can we have a woman pastor? Should we send out missionaries? Should we have pews? Should we have a steeple? Should we have a choir? Should we have a baptistry? What color should we paint the walls? There's no guidance in the scripture on how to organize a church.

Doesn't say how many pastors, doesn't say how many deacons, doesn't say how many elders. Go back to the law of Moses. Tells you exactly, here's the Levites, here's the priests, here's the hewers of wood and haulers of water, here's what you're going to do, here's how you're going to

do it, here's what you're going to wear.

You're going to have this many stones on your breastplate, you're going to have this many tassels on your garment, it's going to be made out of this kind of cloth with this kind of design right down to the nines. There's none of that in the New Testament. It ought to knock us in the head and wake us up, this is different.

We're not playing by rules anymore. God has set a higher standard in this age. It's too easy to follow rules.

Rules are the easy way. And that's why we keep trying to go back and say, well, but look, I've done this, this, and this, and this, that ought to be good enough. God has a higher standard because now it's not an external measure, it's internal.

Instead of looking at righteousness on the outside, now righteousness is looked for by God on the inside, and truth be told, it always was. But the outer trappings have been stripped away. Christ in you is now the standard.

The hope of glory, the hope of pleasing God is Christ in you. God is looking at the thoughts and intents of the heart. It isn't what you do.

You can have a very interesting, you know, you can have a pew full of people in the church. Say you've got eight people in the pew, and the usher comes down and hands the offering plate to person number one, and they pass the plate, and each person reaches into their pocket, takes out a five dollar bill, and drops it in the plate. Well an external measure would say, there's righteousness, gave to the church, five dollars each, gosh, that's twenty dollars a month, and a hundred and however many dollars a year, and well, there can't be anything wrong with that.

The Old Testament external standard, the Judaizer standard, the Galatian standard would be, you've got eight righteous people sitting there. And oh look, number eight there put in a ten, he's even more righteous, and so forth. God doesn't even look at the denomination on the bill.

God doesn't need money. I mean, he invented the concept. He owns the cattle on the thousand hills.

He's got divine power that's far above everything. I mean, we're so silly when we think that our money is somehow going to fuel the plan of God. God is looking in the heart of each person.

There might be person number seven that felt around in their pocket and didn't have a five. If they had had it, they would have given it, but they don't have it. That number seven person is just as righteous in God's eyes because it's in the heart.

You know, Jimmy Carter got all that abuse when he was talking about adultery in his heart and so forth, and everybody's familiar with, you know, if you've done it in your heart, you've sinned. Well,

righteousness in this age is the same way. If you have accomplished it in your heart, it's righteous.

You can't say, well, you know, I did it in my heart, so then I didn't follow through, because that's also in your heart and you're transparent before the eyes of God, but the measure is in our heart. That's why the hope of glory is Christ in you. And if it's not the personal presence, what must it be? It must be the Christ likeness, the characteristics of Christ, the similitude of Christ.

Remember when God created man, what was the description? God created man in his own image and after his own likeness, and that's said before we sinned and fell. So if we have Christ in us, we've recaptured the image of God, because what has Paul just said in the first chapter of Colossians, Jesus Christ is all the fullness of deity in bodily form. He is God.

All of his righteousness, all of his beauty, all of his love, all of his compassion, all of his wonderful characteristics, Christ embodies those. If Christ is in us, we've met God's righteous standard, haven't we? Because we have love and joy and peace and patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, self control and all of the other fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5, 22 and 23. This is what we're going to see as we go through.

Look now at Galatians 4, 19. We have sort of the context for Galatians and why Paul is saying these things. He says he's talking about these people who are trying to drag them into a system of rules to measure themselves by what they do instead of who they are.

Look at verse 16. Have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth, because I point out that this is not righteousness, that following the law is not going to please God, is not going to qualify you for the hope of glory. These people in verse 17 of Galatians 4, they zealously court you, but not for good.

They want to exclude you that you may be zealous for them. And a lot of people who set themselves up as sort of the godfathers of righteousness and will follow me and I'll show you how to be righteous have their own agenda. And you get this with the golden shower faucets and some of the other things that we've seen in recent years.

Look at verse 18. It is good to be zealous in a good thing always. And not only when you have an apostle with you, not only when you, this is what parents tell their children.

Wouldn't it be great if you were zealous to pick up your room and do the right thing, even when your mom and dad aren't here looking over your shoulder. If you had become the kind of person that recognizes the value of doing the right things and finishing things that are supposed to be finished and following policies in the house that are supposed to be, you know, isn't it great when you can trust your child, you can go away and you're not afraid they're going to burn the house down with matches or they're going to break windows or steal money out of some purse that's left behind or whatever, that you have faith in who they are and not just that, well, I've set these rules

and I'll spank you if you break them or I'll deprive you of privileges. And so as long as you're watching, they're going to follow the rules out of fear of reprisal.

That's what Paul says in verse 18. It's good to be zealous in a good thing, to have zeal for it, to see that it's a good thing and to want to do it because you know it's good, not just because somebody's looking over your shoulder. He says in verse 19, my little children for whom I labor in birth.

This is Paul suffering on behalf of the church. He's laboring and it's like birth pains that he's going through. He says, I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, until you become the kind of person who is zealous for good works on your own and not because an apostle is on your tail here.

He says, I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone because I have doubts about you. Seems like when I'm there, you're all enthusiasm and let's get with the program. But now that I'm absent and having to write you letters, you're falling apart and listening to these people who tell you you need to follow rules.

I'm laboring in birth again until Christ is formed in you. Christ is formed in you. You don't have a personal presence of someone formed, do you? It's not like the smoke from the genie's bottle and it suddenly materializes into a person.

Christ formed in you. This is the construction of Christlike character, the characteristics and the attitudes and the priorities and the viewpoint of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, if you see me, you have seen the Father.

And yet in other places, the Bible says, God says, no man can see me and live. Well, that sounds like a contradiction. If you can't see God and live, but when you see Christ, you've seen the Father.

Obviously, there's a difference there. And what is it? Jesus says, if you've seen me, you've seen the character of the Father, you've seen his love, his patience, his grace, his compassion, his long suffering. Look at the abuse that Jesus took and uttered not a word.

He opened not his mouth when people spit on him. He and scourged him and sent him to the cross and crucified him. His words about them were, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

That's the attitude of God, the Father. Some theologies and some systems paint God as this terrible, dark judge in the sky looking for a way to judge us. And just the smallest little slip and into the lake of fire, you go look at Jesus Christ.

People say, oh, you know, Jesus was so human and compassionate. Even the secular world looks at him and says he was such a model of love and compassion. Well, if you've seen him,

you've seen the Father.

That's God, the Father in heaven. That's his attitude. That's his compassion.

But it's not the person of God, the Father, that you see, it's his likeness, it's his image. Jesus Christ is the icon we saw in Greek, the image of God, the Father. Well, if that image is formed in us, we will have Christ in us.

And that's the hope of glory. There's so many more verses we could go to with this. If you go to just the next book there, Ephesians, chapter four and verse six.

Again, there are Ephesians is one of the great books talking about being in Christ and Christ in you. But you can look at Ephesians four, six. He's talking.

He begins in verse four. There is one body, one spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling. Doesn't matter.

Some people are pastors, some are evangelists, some are have a gift of encouragement or a gift of help or a gift of ministering to people's physical needs, a gift of prayer, a gift of faith. There's lots of different ways that people can be a blessing and a benefit to other believers. But whatever it is, we all have the same calling.

It's not like, well, Billy Graham has a different calling than you have or than I have or any other great believer. We tend to sort of use Billy Graham. I guess we can't think of too many others.

And he is a wonderful example. But there's one body. There's one hope of our calling.

There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Verse six of Ephesians four. There is one God and father of all who is above all and through all and in you all.

There is one God in you all. Paul doesn't say in all of you who are trusting or in all of you who are on the right road. He says in you all.

If we're believers in Jesus Christ, God is in us. We have the potential to express his image, but some of us are just terrible reprobates and just, you know, an eyelash away from being taken out of this life because we're no worthily good. God is still in us because we're still every believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit.

It's an irrevocable act of God. It's based on God's promise, God's word, God's criteria. If you believe in Jesus Christ, you are saved, period.

End of discussion. You can't sin. You can't mass murder.

You can't do anything to escape the grace of God. You are saved. You are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

You are gifted. You are sealed. You are baptized.

You are entered into the body and bride of Christ. You can make a list of upwards of 40 different things that happen at the point of faith in Christ that are irrevocable and unchanging. There is a separate set of things that are possible for us that don't happen automatically at salvation.

They're based on what we choose. We can choose to seek understanding of God and his purpose, to have knowledge of his word and his plan. We can seek to have Christ formed in us.

Paul tells these Galatian believers that we were just looking at. If you let these people drag you away, even though you're saved, even though you're sealed, even though you're heaven bound when you die, I, Paul, say to you, this is Galatians 5.2, if you become circumcised, if you let somebody start imposing rules on you and measuring your righteousness and causing you to measure yourself by whether or not you have done good things, I, Paul, say to you, Christ will profit you nothing. What a terrible thing to be true for a believer, bought by the blood of Christ, that Christ profits you nothing, even though you've got those 40 things.

I testify again in verse 3, to every man who becomes circumcised, he is a debtor to keep the whole law. If you start following one rule, you've got to go get all the rules. You've got to find every rule that defines someone that has a genuine heart for God, because that's the only way you're going to establish that you have a genuine heart.

Find every single rule, every single expression, every single circumstance in which someone with a genuine heart for God would do a certain thing, write that down into a rule, and now you've got to keep all of those rules. And if you break even one, you're a debtor to the whole law. He says in verse 4, you have become estranged from Christ.

The Greek word says cut off. You have been cut off from Christ. This doesn't mean you've lost your salvation.

It means you've lost the benefit. You can qualify for a check from the government, maybe a disability check or something, but if you move and leave no forwarding address, you cut yourself off from the benefit. You qualify for it.

You should be getting it, but you've removed yourself from it. Paul says, you have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by rules, you who attempt to be justified by behavior, you have fallen from grace. What are we supposed to be doing? Verse 5, we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

It's what you trust. It's what we believe. It's what we think.

That's Christ formed in us. That's the character of Christ in us. When we think the way God thinks, when we value the things that God values, God values integrity.

God values faithfulness in the little things. God values perseverance under pressure. God values selflessness.

God values self-sacrifice with a willing heart and a cheerful spirit. Some people are self-sacrificial, but it's with a grudging spirit and a annoyed heart, you know, an irritated heart. Well, I'm sacrificing myself and I don't think anybody appreciates it.

We've fallen from grace. We've missed the point. We're doing an action and we think that action is righteous, but if we don't have the heart that God's looking for behind it, the action is meaningless.

You have fallen from grace if you attempt to be justified. We, through the Spirit, eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For these things to happen, for this to be real, our hope has to be real.

It has to be a reality to us that it's worth it. I want to close by mentioning something. I think Janelle made a passing reference to this last week and I was interested, so I live in an age, and this is a truism, you hear it all over the place, where people say, well, we're in the age of instant gratification.

We want what we want right now. We want satisfaction. We want resolution.

We want things to happen and be finished now. We're not willing to put anything off or wait for anything. And there is a thing called the marshmallow test that a man did a few years ago.

There was a psychologist named Walter Mischel, M-I-S-C-H-E-L, at Stanford University. He took some four-year-olds alone into a room by themselves. Each child was told that he or she could eat a marshmallow, one marshmallow.

He could go ahead and eat it now or wait and have two marshmallows when he came back. He said, I'm leaving this marshmallow on the table. I've got to go run an errand.

I'll be right back. You can eat this marshmallow now and that's all you get. But if you'll leave this marshmallow here, when I get back, I'll give you another one and you can have two.

These are four-year-olds. So they're sitting there. One third of the children, as soon as he stepped out of the room, they snatched the marshmallow and ate it.

There was another third that held out for a while, but they finally decided they didn't know when he was coming back. And after some delay, they went ahead and grabbed the marshmallow and ate it. And then the last third waited patiently until the researcher came back and got both marshmallows.

What's particularly interesting is 14 years later, a psychologist named Philip Peake of Smith College had read about this study and it was documented. The children's names were given and

so forth. He was interested.

So he tracked down these four-year-olds that were documented in this study. He tracked them down and the impulsive children, the first third that took the marshmallow right away, he followed what happened to these children in their later lives. How did they do in school? What happened to them once they got out into life? The impulsive third were found to have grown into troubled young adults, stubborn, easily upset, unable to delay gratification.

I got to be gratified and I've got to handle it. The top third, however, were able to cope with frustrations, were more resistant to getting rattled under pressure, they were more self-reliant, and were still able to delay gratification in the pursuit of goals. Of course, this makes sense.

Really, working hard is in itself delayed gratification. You work hard knowing you're going to get a paycheck on Friday or you're going to get a task accomplished and you'll be able to stand back and survey the results of all your hard work. You delay gratification.

The ability to know that something good is happening down the road even though I've got to do something not so pleasant right now. Well, that in a nutshell is the Christian life. Is that second marshmallow real enough to us to be patient and wait? A lot of people want the gratification of recognition from others.

I'm going to do this good work. I'm not going to worry about my motivation. I'm going to do this.

People will recognize it and think well of me. I want approbation. I want approval.

I want to work off guilt. I'm feeling guilty. I'll go work really hard and the guilt will go away.

We want gratification. We want resolution. We want our problems to be solved.

And success in life is often signaled by our ability to see the goal and to persevere in the accomplishment of it, to delay our gratification until it's really meaningful. That's Christ in you, the hope of glory. It's not always easy to make time for Bible study.

It's not always easy to stop in the middle of the day and set aside our pressing tasks and stop and meditate and reflect on the things of God. Remember Psalm 1.1? Blessed is the man who doesn't get tangled up in the things of this life. His delight is in the law of the Lord.

And in that law he meditates day and night. It's not enough even just to come and hear the teaching of the word of God. We've got to stop and cause it to make a difference in our lives.

We've got to meditate on it. Think about it. Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday 4 a.m. and Thursday at lunch and so forth.

We need to remember that there is a hope of glory and it's measured by are we living our lives to please God and looking for his approval or are we living life to get instant gratification and please

ourselves and please others around us. That's the measure. That's when we begin to understand Christ in you.

Remember what the scripture says? Christ who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, went through all of the agonies that you hear about every Easter. He had his eyes fixed on the goal and he endured more than we can ever even comprehend because he knew what was at the end of that. That's Christ.

We can have that character in our souls if we want it, if we value it and if we know how to obtain it and we obtain it by understanding and studying the word of God, seeking the enabling and the leading and the ministry of God the Holy Spirit to help us see what it means. We can look at something in the Bible. We can see these things that we've seen tonight.

Well so what? How should we then live? That's why we have the personal presence of God the Holy Spirit to help us have these things make a difference, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. That's the great sacrifice that pleases God in Romans chapter 12. Don't be conformed to this world, be transformed by the renewing of your minds.

God has given us his spirit, he's given us his word to do those and when we seek that Christ is formed in us and that's the hope of glory. We'll continue this study next week. We're going to look at some specifics.

The one thing we haven't covered tonight is how can we identify that this is taking place? What are the characteristics of Christ in you? What are its manifestations? How can we find some encouragement that this is taking place in our life? Well there are some very specific manifestations of Christ in you and that's what we'll look at when we resume our study next week. But let's close here in a word of prayer. Father we thank you for the enormous privilege.

It's a privilege we probably can't even begin to appreciate as we should of living in this age of being in Christ and having the opportunity for his nature and his character to be formed in us. We thank you for the gift of your spirit. We thank you for the word that we have before us that has been preserved down through the centuries and is so accessible to us in so many different forms today.

We thank you for our calling and for the enablement that you have given us to fulfill it. We pray that through an understanding of these things we will be motivated and encouraged and that the hope of our calling will be more and more real to us so that we can live in a way that pleases you and glorifies our savior Jesus Christ. We pray these things in his name.