

98-10-09a Colossians

Let's prepare ourselves for the study of God's Word. We thank you, Father, for the privilege of gathering with fellow believers who value your Word and who seek the truth. We thank you for your sustaining grace.

We thank you for the blessings that we enjoy from fellowship with one another. We pray tonight that God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us as we study this book of Colossians. We pray that through our study we will receive a living and powerful Word in our souls that the Holy Spirit can use to transform us and to bring us ever closer to the example set by our Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We have arrived in our study of Colossians at a turning point.

Here at the end of the first chapter, we resume tonight in verse 27. I had gone a little bit forward from here and then come back because the subject of Christ in you, the hope of glory, seems to receive short shrift in much of our thinking in modern Christianity, Christianity at large, and as I mentioned last week even in the commentaries and the scholarly work on this book and on this passage, there's not, in my mind, sufficient attention paid to this. Paul has, as we have seen over the course of many weeks, built up to a real high point here in the letter and he says this is what our expectation of glory is based on.

This is the mystery that was hidden from previous ages. This is the content of my commission as an apostle to reveal to you this tremendous truth, Christ in you, the hope of glory. So we want to be sure that we have a good understanding of what this is.

I think there's a lot of misunderstanding and we have begun to look at passages that help us to see that this is not talking about a personal presence of Jesus Christ in the world, that he is personally present to converse with, to speak to us in some way. If you think about it, a personal presence is designed to accomplish something. You may have seen over the past week that there are events that take place, swearings in or funerals, other momentous events and a lot of times the vice president, that's his job, to go and be the representative of the United States government and to indicate how important this particular person was or is.

Sometimes if it's sufficiently important you find the president himself or the president and his wife and a lot of other high government officials in attendance. Why do they do that? Because their personal presence means something. They are there to personally communicate the condolences of the country or the respect and admiration of the country for an individual, depending on if they are living or dead.

Many other times when there's a disaster in the state and the governor comes and he's personally present, there's a reason for that. When he goes back and says I'm going to declare this area a disaster area, he's not doing it on second hand information. He was there and he's

there to indicate the concern and the desire to help that the whole state feels to the people who are there.

So personal presence, when you make your trip and you get there personally, you're sending a message, you're there to communicate. We have the personal presence of God the Holy Spirit and he's there for a purpose. He communicates.

Jesus said several times when the Holy Spirit comes, he is going to communicate. He will lead you into the truth. He will take of the things that belong to me and he will transfer them to you.

He is the communicator. He is the channel of communication. Paul over in Romans, remember in Romans 8, he said we don't know how to pray, the Holy Spirit helps us out in this area of weakness.

He communicates. He facilitates our communication to God the Father through his personal presence. He's the intermediary.

He is the ambassador from God to us. He is our representative back to God. And so when it comes to personal presence and personal communication, God accomplishes that through the Holy Spirit.

It is the presence of God and because the three members are equal, in a sense if you've got one you've got them all because they're co-equal, co-eternal, they share an identical essence, identical glory in many respects regarding their divinity. They also have some unique characteristics. But it's important to understand that when we think of a personal communicating presence, we understand that this is God the Holy Spirit, not God the Father and not the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because if it were the personal presence of Jesus Christ that were an issue, then we would be encouraged to sense his presence, to communicate with him because he is present. And you see some misunderstanding and some wrong thinking in this area in Christianity today in the same way that people misunderstand the Holy Spirit. I saw on television not long ago a man who wrote this big long praise song all about the Holy Spirit and oh Holy Spirit we love you and we think you're so great and we glorify you and we extol you and lift you up.

And it just went on and on and on about God the Holy Spirit. We appreciate the Spirit and we appreciate him as a gift from God, but it is his express purpose to not make an issue out of himself. Anybody who makes an issue out of the Holy Spirit is not being led by the Spirit because God the Holy Spirit does not make an issue of himself.

So it is not a hard conclusion to draw that if someone is excessively focused on the Holy Spirit rather than understanding his ministry and seeking to benefit from it, it is sort of like someone who makes a big deal out of their pastor. If someone fixates on the pastor and thinks about him

and the way he dresses and the way he speaks and his anecdotes and his personality or his failings or whatever else it may be and that rises above what he is teaching and what he is bringing from the Word of God and the way that he is executing his responsibilities in the church, that's an imbalance. That's a wrong way of thinking.

It's often been said, it's not the man, it's the message. We're aware of the man, there are qualifications to be met, there are responsibilities to be fulfilled and we don't hide behind, oh it's not the man, it's the message. It doesn't matter what the man does, it doesn't matter if he's qualified or not, it doesn't matter if he knows what he's talking about or not or how far along he is in the faith or anything else.

These things do matter and we're aware. But for every, you may have heard me point this out before, for every truth that you find in the Word of God, any principle, any doctrine, any piece of truth that has application in life, there is at least one and probably several doctrines that balance it and keep us from carrying it to an extreme. It is true that the message is an issue.

It doesn't mean that the man is never an issue or that he doesn't have to be examined and dismissed if he fails in certain ways or that because of personal failings or personal impropriety, which the reason I bring that up is I think all of us have had experience with that recently and it seems to be more and more frequent. There's not a week that goes by that I don't hear in the news or read in Christian publications about another pastor or another Christian leader in some way who has committed improprieties in personal life that disqualify them from the ministry and a lot of times people go on and on about love and forgiveness and casting the first stone and so forth, which indicates a lack of ability to discern that yes, the message is important and someone may be a great person at doing their job, you can find examples of this anywhere, well he's a great CEO, he's a great president, he's a great pastor, he's a great counselor, he's a great this, that and the other, he does have this liability in this other area. Well, we're fortunate, we are blessed in having the scriptures that give us the standards.

If I or anyone else who stands up to teach the word of God or to exercise authority in the church crosses those lines, that's it. A man can be the greatest teacher since Jesus Christ himself and if he disqualifies himself because he cannot rule well his own household, he can't control his temper, he is profligate with money, he is intemperate in different areas of life, that's disqualification and believers who are seeking to fulfill the will of God are going to go elsewhere for their spiritual leadership and for their spiritual food. That's the way it has to be and if you find that I or anybody else no longer meet the standards that are in Timothy and Titus and elsewhere in the scriptures, then it's your responsibility before the Lord.

You can't say well, I was trying to be forgiving and it's not the man, it's the message. You have a responsibility to look in the scriptures and see if these things are so and your first responsibility is to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is each believer's high priest and he makes provision for leadership, he makes provision for teaching and if one man or one church or one organization disqualifies

itself or peters out as far as being a source of spiritual nourishment, there is another source.

There is provision from God. He will not let the righteous go begging, especially when it comes to spiritual nourishment. So sometimes it's a matter of getting out and asking, seeking and knocking until we find.

I say all of that to say that when we come to address this idea of Christ in you, we need to understand exactly what it is. I think in a lot of believers' minds it is the personal presence of Christ, but that's really confusing because now if Christ is personally dwelling in me, why is he there? Is he speaking? Is he whispering in my ear? Is he taking the steering wheel of my soul? Some people like to think, well God, just take control. I just want to sit back in the corner of my soul somewhere.

You just take me and use me however you see fit. Just grab the steering wheel and do with me what you will. A lot of times people take a perverse sort of pride in their humility, but it's a cop out because anybody can just step back and say, well, I don't want to be responsible.

I don't want to have to think. I don't want to have to decide. I don't want to have to analyze and discern and exercise my senses to no good and evil.

You just do it all and I'll just sit back here and watch. I surrender all. It's a cop out.

God could make robots or puppets all he wants. He is looking for children. How would you like it if your child, you have a child and they're starting to grow up and they say, oh, I'm afraid I'm going to mess up.

Mom and Dad, you just tell me everything and I'll just do it. I'll just mindlessly perform whatever you tell me. I don't want to have to think or grow or mature or have any sort of sense of my own.

It would be appalling for that to happen in a human family and it's equally appalling in spiritual life. God calls us to grow and to mature and to exercise our senses. So we need to know what exactly God has given us by way of resources.

And we do have the idea of Christ in us, but we want to understand exactly what that is. We have the personal presence of God the Holy Spirit and we can come to the point of having Christ in us. We began by looking at passages over in John last week and I want to continue by talking about two specific aspects.

I think we've established in a satisfactory manner that it is the character of Christ formed in us that is being spoken of when we talk about the indwelling of Christ. The whole reason Jesus spent the time that he spent, especially in John 14-17, talking about the ministry of God the Holy Spirit, is to say that he was going away and would not be here. He says, I'm going to a place where you cannot follow.

Enjoy my presence while I'm here. Walk while you have the light because there's coming a time when the light's going to leave and you're going to have to be the light. Jesus said, I am the light of the world.

And then later on he said, you are the light of the world. So there is a sense in which the church, the body of Christ, takes his place here on earth as a presence. And the whole idea of taking someone's place is they're not there.

You don't take someone's place while they're still present. He's not here. Jesus Christ is not in this world.

He is personally seated at the right hand of the Father waiting for his enemies to be made his footstool. We saw that last week. So, if in fact Christ in you is the hope of glory, we saw over in Galatians where Paul says, it's Christ formed in you.

Well, a personal presence, Jesus Christ is not being recreated as a person, is he? His personal presence is intact, always has been, always will be. If Christ is being formed in us, that tells us clearly that this is the character of Christ, Christ's likeness, which has many synonyms in the New Testament. Putting on the new man.

The new man is created in the image of God. Jesus Christ is the image of God, the fullness of deity in bodily form. Hebrews has such a beautiful introduction in Hebrews chapter 1, where the author begins and he says, God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets.

He says, in the olden days, God spoke in different ways, dreams, visions, prophetic revelation, sent prophets with the inspired word and warnings of God to the nation. God used to speak in that way. But, he has in these last days spoken to us by a son.

He sent his son, he sent his own image and likeness, whom he has appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds. So, learning Jesus Christ, that's why we study the word of God. That's what we're looking for, is to catch an understanding of what it means to think like Jesus Christ.

What it means to have the priorities that he has. To have the desire of pleasing the Father that he has. Operating in the faith that he exhibited in his humanity.

Faith in the provision of God. Faith in the providence of God as far as protection, the circumstances that occur in daily life that God has a purpose in creating or allowing those circumstances. And in seeking, first and foremost, in each one of those circumstances to be pleasing to God.

That is what it means to have Christ in you. And we left off last week talking about the idea that

this is going to manifest itself in certain ways. How do we know if we are actually making progress down that road of Christ formed in us? Christ in us.

That's the hope of glory. That's the only expectation that means anything in this life. There is nothing like physical death to straighten out and balance our perspective.

When someone in your family dies, when you're in a situation where someone that you know well, or someone that you're close to, or someone that you've visited, if you spend very much time in retirement homes and so forth, and you grow to have friendships and familiarity with people, and then they check out and they're gone and they are no more, all of us, I think, experience a pretty significant sense of loss. And it always puts us in a very reflective mood about life. Here you live a certain number of days and then everything shuts down.

Your body and soul separate and you're no more in this world. What is the net effect of your existence? Is there any difference anywhere in the fact that God gave you life and breath for X number of years? Where is the permanent value in life? Once we start thinking about the hope of glory, that's the perspective that we'll have every day. Does it really make a difference if I win this argument? Does it really make a difference if I get this task done? Does it really make a difference if I am upset or not upset by this person, or this circumstance, or this political situation, or whatever else? Does all of my ranting and raving and strutting about the stage of life, as Shakespeare put it, you know, we strut and fret our fitful hour on the stage, and then the curtain comes down and it's all over.

And all of our strutting and fretting vanishes at the point that we leave. It gives us the perspective that there are things, even as we do daily tasks, and even as we do things that perish with the using, so to speak, the attitudes that we have, the thinking that goes into it, the motivation and the decisions that we make that glorify God, those are permanent. They last.

They're recorded. They're going to shine like great bejeweled murals in the eternal future. Every time we operate in faith, every time God the Holy Spirit accomplishes bringing us one step closer, every time we fulfill that responsibility to be Christ-like, it does a permanent thing.

It's something that, it doesn't matter what happens to us after that, that act, that decision, that moment when we accomplish God's purpose lives forever. We've written a permanent mark. The wonderful thing is that it is just as permanent as our sins are temporary.

When we fail and when we goof up and when we do everything wrong, there is a permanent book and there is an erasable book. There's all kinds of computer analogies, I will spare you, but there are things you can write permanently. You can carry a floppy disk around for years and stick it in a computer somewhere and still read the information that was recorded.

I've got disks that I recorded 15 years ago. I can still read the data. I can still pull up something that I did way back then.

This is my first seminary papers back in 1985. I can still pull them up and cringe at them. But there are things that I can type into a machine and if the power goes off, it's completely gone.

Almost everybody that does very much work on a computer has had the experience where you've worked all morning and you didn't really save it. You didn't put it on a floppy, you didn't save it on a hard drive. Power goes off.

I was teaching in private school one time and being a student and trying to teach and also being the administrator and doing four or five things all at once, I didn't plan very far ahead. I didn't do things very far in advance. I typically did everything at the last minute.

And so it was the morning of a test for the algebra students. And I never won any prizes in algebra myself, but I was able to teach algebra at the junior high level. But it was test morning and so I was there early in the morning.

It was a cold morning. The building was chilly and damp and I was in there huddled up in my coat, typing over my little computer. And I went in like an hour and a half early and sat down and spent an hour constructing this test.

And I had 20 questions, these little complicated algebra problems and so forth, got them all spaced out and formatted. It was getting just ready to print. And some of the other people started coming into the school in the morning because it was time for school to open up.

And a lady came in and she wanted to take the typewriter and go in the other room. So she reached over and unplugged the typewriter, but she unplugged my computer instead and all of my work went away. And class was going to start in 15 minutes and I had no test to give the students.

Well, that's a temporary thing. All of that work was completely in vain. It vanished as soon as the plug left the socket.

A lot of what we do is the same way. And fortunately, our sins are that way. Because of the blood of Christ, they don't go forward into eternity.

They're not up on a big mural and say, wow, look at the incredible pattern of failure in so-and-so's life. The wonderful thing is that the eternal things are the things that are done in the power of God. Things that are done in the power of man, good or bad, are temporary and perish.

And we can be grateful to God for that. So our goal in looking at Christ in you is to cultivate the eternal things. That's why it's called the hope of glory.

Because glory shines for eternity. God's glory isn't a flash in the pan. It's not like black powder flashes they used to use to take photographs.

It's not like fireworks, where there's a big explosion, a big flash, and then it's gone. God's glory is eternal. It never fades.

It never dims. It's never extinguished. Everything that God has ever done is inscribed in the heavens forever.

I think we will be able to review God's mighty acts in the eternal future. I think we'll be able to go kind of like when we went to the Kennedy Space Center and saw recreations of the launch of Apollo 13 and the walking on the moon and so forth. They've got all of the three-dimensional sense around the actual equipment and all this.

And you really get a taste of what it was like 20 or 30 years ago. I think in the eternal future, we will be able to see the Red Sea part. We'll be able to see fire come down on Mount Carmel and consume the altar and the water and everything around it.

And we'll be able to see all of God's mighty acts, because God's glory is permanent. It doesn't fade. It doesn't dim.

It's unchangeable. It's never extinguished. We can partake.

We can reflect God's glory every day in the smallest things that we do, walking around picking up dirty socks, painting the trim around the door, driving a car, doing all of the mundane things of life. How we execute those things, we can convert these mundane, trivial, seemingly insignificant things into an eternal weight of glory. If we have Christ in us, because Christ in us is the hope of glory.

Jesus Christ did many seemingly trivial things during his earthly ministry. He rode on boats. He walked paths.

He spoke in conversations. He got up early and went out alone by himself to pray. But his thinking and his dedication to fulfilling the will of his Father made each one of those things count.

And the smallest thing that Jesus Christ did retains and reflects the glory of God. And that's our example. That's our hope, is to move in that direction.

So how do we do so, and how do we know when we have begun to do so? Well, we have seen throughout the Word of God, Old Testament and New, that the primary resources God has given us to make that happen are his Spirit and his Word. There are two components that reside in our soul if we are obedient at all. And that's the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

Both of them embody the power of God. The Word of God is alive and powerful. The Holy Spirit has the power of resurrection.

That's how powerful he is. The Spirit that raised Jesus Christ from the dead will give life to your

mortal bodies, Paul says. And we'll see that passage again here shortly.

But with those things at work, how can we see that we're making progress? Well, there are two characteristics that will begin to emerge in our lives that we ought to be able to discern even as we look at ourselves. Our discernment ought to improve. We ought to be able to tell whether or not we are in the faith, whether or not we are exerting our own energy, or whether we are operating in the power of God.

The Word of Christ in us. It's an easy thing to sit in Bible class or in church with the Bible open in front of us and think about the Word of God. But does the Word of God come out at other times? Do you ever recall in the middle of the day or in the middle of doing something, a verse, a little fragment of a verse or a phrase or a principle from a verse? Does something strike you that, you know, you get that, I often get hit with the little fragment of Scripture that says, whatsoever things are good and noble and lovely of good report.

You walk past a conversation, someone starts to engage you in a conversation, and you just start feeling bad. You think, this is, I just, I don't want to hear this. I don't want to talk about this.

This isn't edifying. It isn't building anybody up. And that little fragment of verse comes into your mind.

It's the good and noble and true and lovely things that we should concentrate on. And God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind. You get rattled by something, something takes you back, it jerks the rug out from under your feet.

You thought everything was going to be a certain way, and then it's not going to be that way. And you start getting this real sinking feeling. Or you find yourself in a situation with people, and it just starts grating on your nerves.

You're just rubbed raw. You don't know what to do. Little, if the Word of God is dwelling in us, it's going to surface at those times.

If we're interested in all, if we care at all about Christ in us, the hope of glory, we're going to cultivate those thoughts. We're going to look for those promises and principles and doctrines from the Word of God that will sustain us. If you go back to Proverbs, we haven't actually turned to that in a long time.

I mention it quite frequently, but turn with me back to Proverbs 2. If you have not yet begun personally some effort in memorizing Scripture, this is a great place to start. Proverbs 2. My son, if you receive my words and treasure my commands within you. Now, a lot of us get to the receiving the commands phase.

We know we have either a long habit or the observation of people around us or whatever, and we will assemble ourselves under the sound of the teaching of the Word of God. We receive the

Word. But it goes beyond that.

If you receive my words and treasure my commands, lay up my commands with you. You say, I'm going to sock that away and bring that back out and look at it again later. You know, when you treasure something, you don't just put it away.

You see these cartoons where dogs go and bury bones and then they never remember where they buried them. Well, if the Word of God is like that, if we say, wow, this is a great bone, we go bury it and never dig it up again, it's not going to do us any good. Treasure my commands within you so that you incline your ear to wisdom.

When you find wisdom, and there are many good teachers of the Word of God, there are many great books, there are many classic works that, you know, there's lots of sources of enlightenment and instruction in the Word of God. We incline our ear toward it. We catch, we find out that somebody's a pretty good teacher on the radio or on TV or they have a good book or there's tapes available or whatever.

We get those and incline our ear. You know, I want to keep my mind on wisdom. And you apply your heart to understanding.

Now, this is starting to reflect more and more work with each verse. Look at the level of effort as we go from verse to verse. First of all, we receive and treasure.

Well, that doesn't take, we don't break a sweat doing that. But in verse two, you incline your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding. Now, we're kind of working a little bit.

Verse three, yes, if you cry out for discernment and lift up your voice for understanding. If you look around and you don't find that you have discernment, if you don't find that you're getting teaching or the light shed on the Word of God that you need to understand it and make sense out of it, go to the source. God has promised, ask and you shall receive.

Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. God is not like we are, and we're pretty good to our children.

If our children ask us for something, we knock ourselves out to try to make them happy. If they ask us for food, we don't give them a rock or a snake or a scorpion, the scripture says. Well, God is that much more anxious to give good things to those who ask Him.

So if we're interested at all, we just go and ask. Father, I don't think I'm getting enough. I feel like I'm starving.

I need fuel for my soul. I want to live in a way that pleases you. God is so anxious to hear that kind of prayer that if you ever pray it and mean it, you'll be amazed at what you get drenched with in terms of provision of teaching and explanation or understanding or whatever it is you're looking

for.

If you genuinely want it, not just to get out of a scrape, not just to solve a problem. Oh God, I'm a fork in the road. Do I take A or B? But if you're really looking for Christ in you, the hope of glory, and you pray that prayer, God promises you.

I could say I promise you, but God promises you that you're going to get an answer in spades. If you cry out for discernment and lift up your voice for understanding, verse four, if you seek her like silver. Did you see this on TV where they have these men that go out and look for sunken wrecks? The guys that have gone down and seen the Titanic and run their cameras in there and the chandeliers and the rails and all of that.

But now they're looking for treasure ships. Well, there was this Spanish galleon that sunk with all these bars of silver and bars of gold and this, that and the other. And they go out there and one of these documentaries on PBS where the hardships and the grueling, these guys go down, they can only stay down for 20 minutes without getting the bends, and while they're down there they use these hoses and it's back-breaking work.

There's sharks and there's, I mean, they go through this incredible back-breaking, torturous work to try to find this treasure. Because they say, you know, if we just find that one treasure ship, it'll all be worthwhile. And sometimes all they find are old dinner plates and rotting wood and nails and belt buckles and old rusty swords and things.

Things that we might find really interesting for their historical value, but they're looking for the treasure. And they say, well, you know, here's another sword, here's a cannon. Oh boy, you know, big old heavy cannon.

They take it up and give it to a museum. They're looking for the gold and the silver. And they knock themselves out year after year after year after year.

This last guy I saw has been doing this for like 14 years. Spends a couple of million dollars every summer from investors to go out and seek the big strike. Well, it's work.

But in their mind, it's worth it. If I find that treasure, it'll all be worth it. If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures, then, and this is the promise part, if you receive and treasure and incline and apply, cry and lift up your voice, seek and search, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

For the Lord gives wisdom. From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright.

He is a shield to those who walk uprightly. He guards the paths of justice. He preserves the way of his saints.

So that in verse nine, you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path. We covered this concept when we talked about divine guidance. A lot of people wish that God would give them a little weather vane.

And whenever they come to a fork in the road, it would point the way. Oh God, just show me the way of prosperity. Show me the way of peace.

Show me the way of happiness. What we ought to be praying is, God, show me the way of wisdom. Give me understanding.

Give me insight and appreciation for your person, your plan, your son, Jesus Christ. And all of these other things will be added to us. We will find by seeking that goal that it's not hard to figure out what the right choice is in any given circumstance of life.

And we're not gonna be worried about the circumstances because we know that God can bless in any circumstance. We've been saying in our study in Genesis, Abraham isn't worried now, after coming out of Egypt, about where he goes in the land. He says, God can bless me anywhere.

I can, Lot can take the fertile plain there with all the Sodomites. I'll go up here to the rough country. And God still blesses him and he's still going to double and triple his flocks.

He's still going to have the son of promise out there in the wilderness because he's now trusting the promises of God. So this, if we're interested in seizing and laying hold of the hope of glory, Christ in you, this is where it comes from. This is the priority we have to set for ourselves.

We have to make up our mind what's important. Am I mainly concerned about getting through my day and getting through my week and getting through my life in a reasonably average fashion or am I looking for the hope of glory? If we look for the hope of glory, we're gonna pay attention to the word of God. And one of the manifestations is that because we've had this attitude of seeking and searching, asking, and God responding by giving us that knowledge and wisdom, the word of Christ, the word of God will dwell in us.

There's got to be a result of that. If you took nitroglycerin inside of yourself and then shook yourself violently, you can't contain the power of that explosive. It's going to have to manifest itself in some way.

If we take in the living and active power of God into our souls, it's not just going to sit there like a wall hanging. It's alive and powerful. The word of God is living and active.

That's the way it's translated in one Bible. It has to make a difference. It's dynamic.

God the Holy Spirit is gonna take that word and so as you'll notice. You ought to notice it. You ought to find yourself in the middle of the day with a fragment of a verse or a promise or a principle or a doctrine striking you.

If it's not, wake up. Get, figure out where the problem is, where the stoppage is. There's some spiritual problem someplace.

If the word of God, no matter how much you listen to it, listening to it is just the first step. It has to make a difference day by day by day. It has to draw us up short when we're contemplating something that's about to be a sin.

We're about to get violently angry. We're about to be impatient and lash out at someone. We're about to make a decision based on selfish impulse instead of unselfish thinking about what would glorify God, what would reflect the character of Christ.

It ought to make a difference. It has to make a difference. We don't have the power to make that difference in ourselves, but the word of God does.

In the hands of the Spirit of God, it will. So the means, the answer to the question, how do I do that, is to soak ourselves in the word of God and watch for it. Incline our ear to it, ask for it, and cultivate meditation on it and cultivate it cropping up in our routine thinking in the routine times of life.

That alone will distinguish a believer from 95% of the rest of us who are believers because 95% of believers walking the planet today don't ever set that priority, don't ever get that far. We cling on to salvation. It's our ticket to the train going to heaven, and that's as far as we get.

We go on living a life that doesn't accomplish God's purpose. There is a minority, the few there be, that find the narrow road through the straight gate that leads to life. But that's where we want to be.

But, you know, it's like anything else that's worth having. You have to want it, and you have to know how to achieve it. Christ in you, the hope of glory comes from the Word of God in you.

And that's why we have passages such as Proverbs 2. That's why we have passages like Colossians 3, verse 16. If you look over a page from our study, let the Word of Christ, this is Colossians 3.16. You know, we have John 3.16 that we like to use for a salvation verse. Well, for a believer's verse, think of Colossians 3.16. This is another great one to memorize.

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. This is how Christ is formed in us.

This is what it means to have Christ in us. This is the hope of glory. Letting the Word dwell in us richly.

What does it mean to dwell in us richly? Well, it's got to do something. It has to make a difference. It's not just that it changes our schedule a couple of times a week, or even that it

changes our schedule daily because we're going to sit down and listen to it.

It's got to make a difference the other 23 hours of the day. This is the reason we have passages like John 15 and verse 7. This is in that great section, John 14-17, where Jesus is in the upper room talking to His disciples, talking to His Father. In John 15-7, He's talking to the disciples.

He says, "...if you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so you will be My disciples." This, of course, is Church Age truth. We know from its position in the book here.

"...if you abide in Me and My words." He doesn't say, if you abide in Me and I abide in you, does He? Because He's not talking here about personal presence. Christ in you, Christ formed in you, is letting the Word of Christ dwell in us. If My words abide in you, Jesus says, you can ask whatever you desire, and it will be done for you.

How can He get away with saying that? I could start asking for Rolls Royces and millions of dollars and wealth and fame and so forth. But I won't, because if the Word of Christ is dwelling in me richly, if I'm abiding in Christ and His Word is abiding in me, I'm going to be thinking like Christ. And Christ didn't ask for Rolls Royces, and He didn't ask for Frigidaires and millions of dollars and so forth.

He prayed like Proverbs 2. He asked His Father for wisdom. He asked His Father, not My will but Thine be done. And that's the kind of prayer we will pray.

And any prayer we pray in that vein, with that motivation and that attitude, prayers prayed to God seeking to please Him and fulfill His will, God will answer every single one of those prayers in the affirmative. You will ask what you will because your will is going to be the will of Christ. And you can ask it in the name of Christ with a pure heart and full assurance of faith.

Nothing doubting, as James says. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God. Nothing doubting, because you know God's going to answer that prayer.

And if you pray something in the name of Christ, and you know that it's God's will because you know His Word and His Word is dwelling in you, and you've got a promise. You can watch Judge Wapner. I think now they've got the guy that used to be the mayor of New York, Ed Koch, sits on the bench at the People's Court.

They come in. People may feel sorry for them as can be, but to make the case, you've got to have documentation. Did you bring your receipt? You're asking for \$1,500 here.

Did you bring a receipt for this repair cost or this damage? Do you have photos? Do you have proof? Do you have something to back up your claim? Well, when we go to God the Father and we pray something in the name of Jesus Christ, what are we basing it on? Do we ever stop and think when we make this request, what's my case law here? What's my precedent? What am I

standing on in the Word of God? If the Word of Christ dwells in us, when we go to make a request of God, Lord, please do this and that and the other form-like parents. What are we basing that on? Oh God, I feel real sorry for them and they're having a tough time. Or God, you have said, honor your father and mother.

I care about my father and mother and I'm asking you to bless them. I'm asking you to keep them. I'm asking you to preserve, protect, heal, whatever it may be, because I honor my father and mother.

They're in the periphery of my family. They're perhaps a believer. Whatever basis we can find in the Word of God, we go to God with our documentation.

God, you have said, you have promised. This is the principle that I'm claiming. This is the principle I'm standing on.

I'm praying this in the name of Jesus Christ. If you find it documented in the Word of God and your understanding is accurate and you pray those things in the name of Jesus Christ, you can have great confidence that God is going to honor that prayer. He's waiting for us to exercise our understanding to have the Word of Christ dwell in us richly.

We ought to be able to see it. You can see it very clearly in prayer life. You can see it very clearly in decisions that we make.

Why did we make this decision? Do we have any biblical stance for it at all? I don't want to go to Sodom. That's why I'm not going to go to this place or associate with these people or enter into this contract. These are the things we want to watch for.

We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll see the other thing we want to watch for that will help us to discern that we are in fact growing in Christ. Let's pause and take our break.