

98-11-11a Colossians

Let's prepare ourselves for the study of the Word of God this evening by pausing for a moment to collect our thoughts. Father, we thank You for this day. We thank You for Your many blessings.

We thank You for the opportunity that we have to gather with believers of like mind and to seek the ministry of Your Spirit as we look at the truth of Your Word. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us and give us understanding and the proper insight into these things. We pray that we will not only understand them at an intellectual level, but be able to see the meaning and application that these truths have to our daily lives.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We resume tonight in the book of Colossians.

We are on the doorstep of Chapter 2. And last week we almost completed our summary and review of Chapter 1. There's one last set of points I would like to cover with you regarding the last part of Chapter 1 where Paul talks about the mystery that is revealed among the Gentiles, Christ in you, the hope of glory. And having just covered that, it's fairly fresh in our minds, but one thing I have not covered with you is some of the synonyms for this great truth that are found in the New Testament. We've looked at many passages where that term is used, Christ in you, or some reference to us being in Christ, especially John Chapter 15 and so forth, abiding in Him.

But we have many such synonyms because, after all, if this is the thrust and the point, if this is the great revealed mystery in this age and the substance of our calling as believers, you would expect that it would be referred to quite often in the New Testament Scriptures. And, in fact, it is. We are not able to do an exhaustive study, but I'm just going to direct our attention to a few of the major passages and the major synonyms that refer to this.

And you will be able to identify the others, I'm sure, when you run across them. But the idea of Christ in us, we're going to see both in this review and as we get into Chapter 2, some insight that substantiates our understanding. Because, if you'll remember, probably the major thing that we said about Christ in you is that it's not, we don't understand it to be the personal presence of Jesus Christ.

And that may be a departure for some of us that have been taught a different way in the past, but oftentimes this has been presented in terms of the indwelling of Christ as his personal presence. He is more or less physically present in our soul. And we're of a mind, just from the passages we've seen thus far, that this is much more talking about the character of Christ, Christ-likeness.

And probably our clearest passage on this is just a book or two back in Relations, where Paul says, I'm undergoing labor pains with you again until Christ is formed in you. Well, the personal presence of Jesus Christ is not something that's going to be formed. A person is either present or absent.

It's not like beaming in. It's not like being on the Enterprise where you hit the transporter switch and you sort of fizzle and sparkle and gradually appear and Christ is formed in you. And so that phrase alone tells us that this is something that takes place as a process and it is Christ-likeness.

So watch for that as we look at these synonyms. First of all, in Hebrews chapter 3 and verse 14, this concept of Christ in you is referred to as being a partaker of Christ, being a partaker. And this makes sense.

You can partake of a lot of things. You can partake of the world. You can partake of a particular viewpoint in the spiritual realm.

You can subscribe to a philosophy or a religious code of some sort. But in Hebrews chapter 3, the author in verse 12 says, Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Now those two verses, and the reason we catch this context before we go to verse 14 is these are brethren who are trusting in the living God. And the warning is don't depart from the trust that you currently have. Don't be hardened.

You're not hard now. Don't let yourself become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Then in verse 14, For we have become partakers of Christ, if... And there's a big if there.

You would think, well, indwelling of Christ, it's been taught as being automatic for all believers. It's one of the 36 things that happens at the point of salvation and so forth. There's a separate element of positional truth that we could talk about.

But in our daily experience to be a partaker of Christ, to have Christ formed in us is, as we have seen, the building of Christlike character, faith, hope, and love. And the more of those three Christian virtues that develops in our soul, the closer we are to Christlikeness. And we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.

And this is obviously not something related to salvation. Occasionally you have people come here and say, now see, you're only saved if you persevere. But what this is talking about has nothing to do with the point of salvation.

It has everything to do with our daily salvation, our deliverance out of this present evil age, and becoming a partaker and remaining a partaker of Christ. Holding fast our confidence, not being moved away from the hope we have. So this is the synonym here, partaker of Christ.

And you can see that it has sort of a double reference, because not only does it refer to being a partaker of Christ in terms of his character, but also a partaker of Christ in terms of the inheritance. The two go hand in hand. To the extent that we are partakers of his character and

nature, to that extent also we are partakers of his glory in the age to come.

So that's Hebrews 3.14. And a very similar statement is made by Peter over in 2 Peter 1.4. He uses the same word, partaker. But in 2 Peter 1.4 he says, we have become partakers of the divine nature. And of course the divine nature, Christ embodies the divine nature.

All the fullness of deity dwells in him in bodily form. So in 2 Peter 1.3, Peter talks about God's divine power that has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness. This sort of echoes what Paul said in Colossians 1, doesn't it? All things in Christ, he is before all things, in him all things consist.

Peter says he has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us. And once again, there's the key. How do we seize these things and lay hold of them? They sound grand when we talk about them, but what is the means of seizing and holding these things from God? It's through knowledge.

That's why we place such an emphasis on studying the Word of God. By which, by the knowledge of him has been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises. So that through these promises, if somebody asks you, what is the substance of the Word of God? When you study the Word of God, what is it you're learning? One handy way of remembering it is promises, principles, and doctrines.

Promises are those things that God has stated that are true. Promises often have conditions. We are partakers of Christ if we hold fast.

We have an inheritance in the future if we hold fast and so forth. But promises, and those are the first things we turn to when the chips are down. When we're under pressure, you can't always think through 12 or 13 different points of a doctrine or think deep theological thoughts in terms of principles.

We just reach out and claim the promises of God. They are succinct statements of the faithfulness of God. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.

He preserves the way of his saints, it says over in Proverbs 2 and so forth. These promises, the great and precious promises, are the means by which we are made to be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. This is a description of what we're talking about.

The corruption that's in the world through lust, it doesn't matter how far along, how many hours or days or years of Bible study we have engaged in, the corruption that is in the world can trip any of us up any time that we don't become immune to that over the course of time. It's always there. The world, the flesh, and the devil are always sources of temptation.

And the farther we advance in God's plan, the more delectable a target we become. And so we

don't assume that we've arrived and we're now pretty well bulletproof and the armor of God just clings to us like a second skin. We're made of Teflon, nothing will stick now.

We're pretty well as close to sinless as you can get. So no matter how far along we get, we always have to be vigilant and watchful about the corruption that comes and attacks us. What is the defense? What is the shield and the armor of God? How is it put on to keep us from falling into this? Well, the first thing we do when we find ourselves under pressure is think about the promises of God.

Reach out and claim a promise. This has been called faith arrest, however you choose to think of it. These are our first line of defense, the quick statements of truth, many of which we have memorized or hopefully will memorize out of the Word of God.

No temptation has overtaken you, but such is as common to man, and with every one comes a way of escape. Casting all your cares on him, for he cares for you. You get the idea.

There are many promises. And these promises are our means of escaping the corruption that's in the world. This is how we flee youthful lusts.

This is how we quench the fiery darts of the wicked one. So in so doing, we are partakers of the divine nature. This is what Jesus did.

What did Jesus do? You have the great example of the temptations from Satan himself. He's quoting the Word of God. He's got those promises.

Man shall not live by bread alone, but every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. They shall not tempt the Lord your God and so forth. He's got those portions of Scripture committed to memory.

They're in his soul, holding defense and protection against these things. So this is a second synonym, partaker of the divine nature. Thirdly, the one we referred to a few minutes ago in Galatians 4.19, Christ formed in you.

Christ formed in you. Once again, because it's a process, this argues against the idea of it being the personal presence of Christ. Jesus, as a person, is going to be sort of fading in gradually into our souls.

Fourth, we have this idea of image in Romans 8.29. Everybody generally can remember Romans 8.28. All things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to his purpose. In Romans 8.29, for whom he called, then he pre-designated to be conformed to the image of his Son. That's what we have been designated.

In this age, believers who come to God through faith in Christ are in a special group. Our purpose, our calling, isn't the same as the patriarchs, isn't the same as the Israelites, isn't the

same as the tribulational saints, isn't the same as the millennial saints. Our calling is to be conformed to the image of his Son.

And that is synonymous with these other terms we've looked at. Romans 8.29. This is also referred to, although somewhat more obliquely, in Romans chapter 12 and verse 2. A lot of folks have memorized Romans 12.1 and 2, wonderful scriptures. Romans 12.2, be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

That is Christ formed in you. That's becoming a partaker of the divine nature. To be transformed, what are we being transformed into? The image of Christ.

Sixth, this is referred to by the term being an imitator of Christ. 1 Corinthians 11.1. 1 Corinthians 11.1. We don't generally think that an imitation is a good thing. I remember when I was a little boy, my father was a staff NCO in the Marine Corps with four kids and not a lot of extra spending cash.

So a lot of times our dessert came from the commissary and it was called imitation ice milk. Name-wise, it's about as far as you can get from real ice cream. Ice milk is imitation ice cream.

Well, this was imitation ice milk. It was actually very good and we enjoyed it. But that's the first thing I think of when I see the word imitation.

I think, well, this is far removed from the original. Imitation ice milk. But Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11.1, Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ.

This is something an apostle can say. You remember our study of apostleship a little bit earlier in this book. Apostles can say this.

Be an imitator of me. We don't go around telling people, hey, imitate me. Follow my example.

You've seen the way I live. Go thou and do likewise. This is what the apostle Paul says throughout his letters.

We don't say that because we're not apostles. Apostles are commissioned to be witnesses of Christ. That's why Paul can fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ because he's Christ's representative on earth.

And this is what has been misunderstood. There's an element of rightness that's been wrongly construed when you look at the Catholic Church's concept of the pope. If the pope was one of the twelve apostles, they'd pretty well have it right to be the vicar of Christ.

What does vicar mean? Well, it's from the same Latin root that we get vicarious from. Vicarious means you're in some way getting a substitute experience. People live vicariously through their

children.

They watch their children enjoy great things in life, and that brings them some pleasure. To do something vicariously means to be at second hand, to be one step removed, to have a substitute. Well, the apostles were, in fact, personal representatives of Jesus Christ.

They were eyewitnesses of him. They were personally trained by him, personally chosen by him, and they had unique functions that belonged to that gift, one of which is the ability to say to believers and to churches, imitate me because I am an imitator of Christ. But once the last apostle went to glory, we don't have believers, or we shouldn't have believers, actually we do, but we shouldn't have believers running around saying, well, I'm your mentor, I am modeling the Christian life for you, so go and imitate me.

This is to arrogate to oneself the function that Jesus Christ assigned to the apostles alone. But that's what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 11. He says, imitate me, and you know, it's fascinating to track how many different times and ways Paul says this to the different churches.

He says, you saw our manner of life when we lived among you, that's how you should live. Imitate me, follow my example. Who of us would dare to say that? But the apostles had a special gift and a special ability to say that.

But he says he is an imitator of Christ, we are to be imitators of him. We have the example of the apostles in the scriptures, and that is the example to which we can turn as a fleshing out and an illustration of the example that we have in Jesus Christ. So to be a partaker of Christ's nature, to understand what that nature is and what its thinking and its priorities entail, we can look at Christ and we can also look at the apostles, the example that is left to us by John and Peter and Paul and so forth.

So an imitator of Christ, this is a synonym for Christ in you. And you find also in 1 Corinthians 4.16 a similar reference. Paul says once again, though you might have 10,000 instructors in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

Therefore I urge you, imitate me. He says, I am your spiritual father. Well again, this is something an apostle can say, but not something I certainly would not want to stand before God and say, well you know this is what I preached when I went around to all the believers.

So in 1 Corinthians 4.15 and 16 you have a connected passage to what we have seen in 1 Corinthians 11.1. Paul says, I urge you, imitate me. This is a bold statement, but Paul says, I am bold in Christ. He says, I have boldness to preach the gospel, I have boldness to live this life that is a reflection and a partaking of the character of Christ.

In fact, the number of times that Paul says this, I will just give you some of the other passages. Philippians 3.17, I think this helps us understand a little bit what Paul says when he says he is

filling up the sufferings of Christ. He says in 3.17 of Philippians, Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

In Philippians 4.9, he says, right after saying whatsoever things are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, and of good report and so forth, he says the things which you have learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. He says, all of the good things that you have seen in my example do these, and the God of peace will be with you. That is something an apostle can say as a representative of Christ, as a partaker of the divine nature.

1 Thessalonians 1.6, another apostolic encouragement. You became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit. He tells the Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians 3.7-9, For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. 2 Thessalonians 3.7-9. Same thing once again in Hebrews. Hebrews 6.12. The author of Hebrews says in 6.11-12, We desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

So this is an imitator of those that exhibit faith and patience. And of course they in turn are imitating Christ in those attributes. Hebrews 13.7 has a similar idea.

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome. This is one of the reasons why it's so important for us to be careful and to follow scriptural guidance in those that we follow in spiritual leadership, the exercise of spiritual leadership. Occasionally people say, Well, failures happen to everyone.

No matter what the failure is, we should forgive and forget and move on and so forth. But you have to be able to make this statement. You have to be able to say, Those who speak the word of God to you, they ought to be exhibiting a faith that you can follow.

You ought to be able to consider the outcome of their conduct and it ought to be an encouragement to godliness. It ought to be an encouragement to Christ-likeness. So Hebrews 13.7 is another important passage in that regard.

1 Corinthians 15.45-50 The spiritual is not first but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of earth, made of dust. The second man is the Lord from heaven.

As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust. As is the heavenly man, so also are those who are heavenly. And this once again, this has a view toward the future.

Jesus Christ partook in the first advent of the dust and died a physical death like Adam, but now he is the heavenly man and we, this is partaker of his nature in a more material sense, looking forward to the resurrection. As we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man. Now this I say, brethren, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

And this is an encouragement to us to start thinking in terms of our incorruptible future, the incorruptible nature of Christ. We know that we are going to be raised incorruptible in the physical sense. We ought to be developing the spiritual character that goes with that.

Be ready to enjoy that existence in its fullness. And then, of course, you have the passage in John 15 that we've referred to earlier, John 15, 4-7, where Jesus says, I am the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me and you will bear much fruit, abiding in Christ.

And he says, if you abide in me and my words abide in you. And when you look at the synonyms in that passage in John 15, you realize that the abiding of the words of Christ in our soul, that is abiding in Christ, and it's also Christ abiding in us. It's used in parallel.

It's used synonymously. The words of Christ abiding in us, that is Christ. The reason why we take the indwelling in Christ the way we do.

So all of these are under the encouragement that Paul gives as an apostle, be an imitator of me as I am of Christ in 1 Corinthians 11, 1. Other synonyms for Christ in you, to be an imitator of God in Ephesians 5, 1. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. That is fullness of deity and bodily form and so forth. To be partakers of the Holy Spirit in Hebrews 6, 4. Anytime you hear Hebrews 6, you can't help but think about the foundation that he says we don't want to lay again, of change of mind away from dead works, faith toward God and so forth, and the impossibility of those who having become believers and been given access to all of the power of God, if they fall away, it is impossible for anyone to renew them to repentance.

The only way they can be renewed is for them themselves to turn and repent. Nobody else can renew them to repentance. That's what this passage is saying.

It says it is impossible to renew them again to repentance so long as they crucify to themselves. See this is somebody on the outside. Can you turn someone who has already tasted the good word of God, has already been a partaker of the Holy Spirit and so forth, can you come in from the outside and turn them around? You cannot.

The scripture says it is impossible to renew them from the outside to repentance so long as they themselves, their action, their choice, is to crucify the Son of God afresh and to put into an open shame. Basically to nullify in their life and in their choices the work that Christ did on the cross. It's like Paul tells the Galatians, if you go back into this legalism, you have fallen from grace and you have cut yourself off from Christ.

It's as though you're not even connected to the vine. And if you're not connected to the vine, you're a dead branch. And you've nullified the grace of God and made it of no effect.

And as long as someone makes that choice to crucify the Son of God afresh and put into an open shame, if that's their choice, that's their action in the passage, it is impossible for anyone on the outside, no pastor, no family member, no friend, to renew them to repentance, which is the first step of growth as a believer. It's not the point of salvation. Repentance is not a part of salvation.

Repentance is what we do after salvation. We change our mind, our lifestyle. So this is referred to as being a partaker of the Holy Spirit in verse 4. It is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit.

This is the mechanism in our souls that enables us to be Christ-like, to be partakers of the divine nature in its fullness. With the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, we become partakers of Christ. And if you turn away from that, it's like the wife of Lot walking the path of deliverance, the upward path of deliverance, away from the city of Sodom, and she just can't leave it.

She's got to turn around and look. And Jesus, during His ministry, said, if someone puts his hand to the plow and then turns back, it's not going to happen. It's not qualified to be a disciple, not qualified for blessing and reward.

Same thing here, becoming a partaker of the Holy Spirit. This is part and parcel of becoming a partaker of Christ. And then finally, being partakers of His righteousness in Hebrews 12.10. Hebrews 12.10 We have human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect.

Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days, these are our earthly fathers, chastened us as it seemed best to them. But He chastens us for our profit, so that we may be partakers of His holiness. And this reminds us of how we finished up chapter 1, where Paul says, I warn every man, instruct every man, so that every man can be presented perfect in Christ.

Warning and rebuke, correction and instruction in righteousness are necessary for us to be partakers of the divine nature, to be those who have Christ in us. And so we have here the partaker of His holiness as a synonym. So this once again is a review and perhaps a slightly different perspective on what Paul concludes the first portion of his letter with in Colossians chapter 1. And this at last gets us to the point where we're ready to begin Colossians chapter 2. And if I acted out the perversity in my nature, I would find a way to stay in chapter 1 for just one more lesson, but we'll move forward.

Because Paul goes on to say, after talking about the preaching and the laboring and striving that he undertakes according to the working of God that works in him mightily, chapter 2, verse 1, I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in

love and attaining to all the riches of the full assurance of understanding to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Now I say this, lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

Now these five verses, 2, 1 through 5, form a section. And you can see the idea, we've talked many times about chiasm or inclusio, where you have elements on the outside and concentric rings of things on the inside. But you'll see Paul talking about the fact that he is not physically present in verse 1. And he talks about it again in verse 5. Though I am absent, there are some things I want you to know.

Though I am absent, I rejoice with you. Though I seem to be absent in the flesh, I am present with you in spirit. And as we think about this, it raises a little bit of a question.

Is this some sort of a mystical presence? You remember over in Corinthians, Paul says, I am with you in spirit. And so when you're assembled together, and you would think, well that's just sort of a thing like we say, I'm laid up in the hospital, I can't go to the big ball game, but I'll be with you in spirit. But Paul, if you go back, remember when they're going to rebuke the man who's shackled up with his stepmother and so forth.

And he says, so when you are assembled together with my spirit, and he gives the idea that there's something more to this than just wishing them well and praying for them and so forth. He says, I am absent from you in body, but I am present with you in spirit. So when you assemble together with my spirit, this is what you need to do.

And we have a similar idea here where Paul emphasizes the fact that though he is not physically there, and they have not seen his face in the flesh, he is in a position to engage in ministry to them. Well what is the nature of this ministry? And why does he say this? Why does he start out in chapter 2 verse 1? I want you to know what a great struggle I have for you. He's just talked about this in verse 29, hasn't he? He says, I labor, striving.

The word for striving here is agonizomai. Agonizomai. You know what English word we get from that.

Agony. Agonize. But in our taking over of the word, we have the idea of intense pain and suffering and so forth, but in Greek, agonizomai meant to strive or to struggle, to engage in a great contest of some sort.

Struggling. It was used of wrestling matches and even of military conflict. Agonizomai.

I struggle. I strive. According to his working, which works in me mightily in verse 29.

And this is energeia, the noun and the verb both in verse 29. And energeia in the Greek New

Testament always refers to supernatural. Every time you find *energeia* in any of its forms in the New Testament, it is a reference to the power of God.

It's never used of human power. It's never used of six horses on your chariot. It's always the supernatural power.

So the power of God that is working in Paul is going to be the same power that is working in you and in me when we let it. And that is the spirit of God. And he says, for, when we get to chapter 2, verse 1, he says, he's referring back to verse 29.

He says, I've got this great struggle. There's an energy working in me mightily. For I want you to know what a great... And then he uses *agona*.

He uses the noun form of *agonizomai* in verse 1. I want you to know what the great struggle or conflict is that I have for you and for those in Laodicea. You remember Laodicea? It's down at the other end of the valley from Colossae. Laodicea is the young, thriving, growing, vital town.

Colossae is the backwater has-been. Paul says, I want you all to know way off there in the Lycus Valley what a great struggle I have for you. Now, what kind of a struggle is Paul having? He's chained up in prison.

Baphras has come to visit him, and he's sharing his imprisonment for a while. So how can he, what sort of labor can he be engaged in that's going to be on their behalf? How is whatever Paul's doing in the prison cell going to benefit believers way across the... What sort of a conflict would this be? Well, he tells us what the purpose of it is, and that tells us what the nature is. He says, this great conflict that I have for you and for those in Laodicea, and for all of those who have not seen my face in the flesh.

There are others that Paul has not visited and at this point cannot visit because he's a prisoner. He says, but even though I'm not there physically, I'm still struggling, and the power of God is working in me mightily on your behalf. Well, we tend to just read and go right over these things, but if you think about it, this would be like... We always pick on Billy Graham because he's well-known, but say Billy Graham was off in a Turkish prison for some reason.

He'd been over there trying to have a crusade, and they'd locked him up, and he sent our little group a letter. Maybe we were contributing and helping out his crusades and so forth. I'm sure they would be depending heavily on our financial support and so on.

Billy Graham gets locked up, and so he sends us a letter back here in Dallas. He says, I haven't been able to come visit you. I haven't ever visited your group and seen you face-to-face, but I'm over here in this Turkish prison, and I'm striving and struggling mightily, and the power of God is working in me greatly on your behalf.

We think, hey, Billy, you're on the other side of the globe. What kind of struggle can you be engaged in that's benefiting us? Well, we have the answer to that in these verses, if we look at them carefully. We're going to pause and take our break, and when we come back, we'll see that even not only separated by distance, but also separated by time, the struggles and the power of God working in Paul is still benefiting us even today.

Let's pause here and take our break.