

Colossians Overview – “Jesus is All That We Need” – June 2, 2019

The apostle Paul was compelled to write a letter to the churches in Colossae and Laodicea, whom he had never met, because his friend, Epaphras, had brought a report to him when he visited Paul in prison in Rome. The report, while bringing the positive affirmation of the Colossians’ faith and love for those who believed in Jesus, also noted a threat to the church concerning how we are able to *know* God *fully*. The Colossians were being threatened by a false gospel which added some things to Christ Jesus as the means of knowing God *fully*. Sure, you need Jesus, His death and resurrection, but that only makes the blessings of God *available*, they would say. After that, it’s up to you to obtain deeper knowledge, deeper encounters, and deeper truths, through special techniques and mediators.

This is a threat that has been constantly present in the life of churches for the past 2,000 years, and is particularly spreading in our day and in the culture of modern Suburbia. It is a slippery false doctrine that sneaks its way into churches through words of affirmation which sound like love, but which subtly redefine the nature of the Christ, why He came, what He has promised, and whether His work is sufficient to accomplish God’s will. It subtly puts the emphasis on *us* and, while giving lip service to the greatness of Christ, takes our eyes off of Him with the teaching that His work is incomplete, or that God’s work of redemption is contingent upon us. And what is so sneaky about

this doctrine is that it claims to hold the orthodox teachings of the faith, but then adds some things to Christ. In a word, it denies that Christ *alone* is sufficient, and instead seeks to add some other performance or experience as a necessity to truly, or fully, know God. This “addition” to Christ is called syncretism, from the Greek “*sun*”, which means “*together*”, and “*kresis*”, which means “*mixture*.” It is the mixing together of two faith systems, thus creating a third which is neither of the originals.

Now, what is deceptive about syncretism in the church is that it claims to be true Christianity, the truth, but it is actually a deviant “third thing,” a different gospel. While using Christian terms, and being able to acknowledge certain Christian orthodox doctrines, it denies others or alters their definitions to mean something different. And this is still happening today. For example, someone will say, “Yes, Jesus died for our sins.” But, what they mean is that Jesus died as a picture of how bad our sins are. What they don’t mean is that Jesus’ death paid down our sin debt in order to justify us or forgive us. Do you see the difference? Using the same phrase, they would disagree that sin needs to be atoned for, that God must be just, or that we must be forgiven through such judgment. This is a denial of the centrality of the Christian gospel, but it agrees with the phrase. This is how syncretism, and every false gospel, works.

For, every false teaching in the church claims to be the truth, uses Christian terms but redefines them to mean something different, uses half-truths in order to be received as “plausible” in the household of faith. Yet, they deny the sufficiency of Christ alone, and create a false gospel which is about man’s power and man’s doing rather than about God’s power and God’s doing in Christ Jesus.

This is what was happening in Colossae. You see the nature of the deception in the words which Paul absconds to use, which are very uncommon, if not absent, in his other letters. He uses words like “fullness” and “mystery” and “knowledge” and “wisdom” and “philosophy” and “elemental things”. It appears that were those who claimed that one could gain more wisdom, more knowledge of God, deeper knowledge of God, greater fullness of God, by means of something *in addition to* Christ Jesus.

And these means of gaining a “deeper knowledge of God” were primarily of two kinds: First, they added asceticism, avoiding certain foods or certain holidays, or eating only certain foods or celebrating certain rituals. And second, they added some inner esoteric experience, some spiritual “encounter” with God through visions or angelic visitations, some “foundational elements of reality” which, if activated, would grant one deeper knowledge of God. Now, this sounds identical to a growing movement in the American church today, which has syncretized New Age spiritualism with the

Scriptures and tried to pawn it off as “Spirit-filled Christianity.” It is a non-denominational movement which calls itself the “New Apostolic Reformation”, which includes Bethel Church in Redding, California, and its School of Supernatural Ministry, which teaches that you can attune yourself to deeper knowledge of God through “encounters” and “visions” and “dreams” and spiritual esoteric experiences of ecstasy or encounters with powerful feelings. They have taught that you can use New Age methods and means to gain God’s power while also rejecting the false parts about it, “by chewing on the meat and spitting out the bones”, a phrase they use often to justify adding spiritual mysticism and pagan soothsaying techniques as means to know God. This is simply searching for the “elemental things” as the means of spiritual encounters which they mistake for the knowledge of God.

It is the false teaching of the Hillsong churches, which elevate the experience of power encounters over the sufficiency of Christ crucified and raised and the gospel of grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Both of these entities gain footholds in churches through their music, which softens Christians up to hear their teachers. Do not be taken captive by such empty forms of so-called “words of wisdom.” It is the syncretism of adding New Age techniques and principles in a search for power encounters, ecstasies and euphoric feelings, none of which is how God has revealed Himself in Christ. Such spurious teachings include the “law of attraction”, the same “law” which Oprah and Eckhart Tolle espouse, teaching that you can attract

spiritual blessing through the words that you speak and the attitude that you have. This is simply stating that Jesus is insufficient to obtain God's blessing for you, and that your words and works are necessary, that the power of your "full" redemption is not in Christ alone, but in something inside of you, done by you, spoken out loud by you. It is a terrible and destructive perversion of the gospel of Jesus Christ and it is growing in our own backyard. I do not mention these organizations to simply be divisive, though truth always divides from error, but because these perversions of the gospel are gaining ground in our evangelical churches and shipwrecking the faith of many. Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians for moments just like this, and he speaks strongly, so we must listen intently.

He condemns all such teachings as "worthless" (2:23) and "defrauding you...not according to Christ." (2:8) He argues strongly that Christ, and Christ alone, is sufficient to know God in the most intimate and experiential way. There is no greater experience or deeper necessity for intimacy and reconciliation with God, no other power needed to be activated or achieved or encountered. All we need is Jesus. He alone is the fullness of Deity dwelling in bodily form. You need no other power, no other encounter, no other experience, no other rules or training or activation of anything. Jesus is sufficient. He is the power over all other powers and all other claims of "words of wisdom" which do not find their sufficiency in His completed work is arrogant disagreement with God and utterly worthless!

Rather, the gospel is the *announcement* that God has worked *everything necessary* to reconcile sinners to Himself *fully and completely and without lack*. In this we see that the gospel is not something that we do, but something which God has done. It is a message of what God has worked to bring peace between himself and his enemies. It is not good advice on how to live so that we can change our destiny or accomplish the will of God or defeat the Devil. These are implications to the work of God, which surely do affect how we live, which Paul will cover in this letter, but they are the outcome, the outflow, the result of the gospel, not the cause, or the origin, or the power of God's blessing. They are the fruit, not the root. The root is all the work of God alone through the person and work of Christ Jesus alone. He is sufficient for all things which God desires and requires, and no plan of God is contingent upon any man other than Jesus, the supreme and sufficient *Savior*. You do not need esoteric experiences, secret messages from God, the avoidance of certain foods or certain holidays, or some kind of "second blessing" or power encounter with the divine. Jesus is enough.

Thus, the good news of the crucified and resurrected Jesus, the Lord who conquers death and sin is simply that: good NEWS. It is a fact with which we must reckon and walk in the light of its reality. This, then, is always how we are to relate to God, to each other, and to the world. What has God done and what are the implications of it?

Look at how Paul begins this letter with prayer, not as some technique to activate God's blessings, but rather as gratitude for God's gracious working of blessing already accomplished: "We always thank God when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for the saints."

Why would Paul thank God for that? Because God did it. Faith is God's work and God's gift. This does not mean that it is against our will. No! Not at all, but God has worked to enliven our will so that it is we who believe in Jesus, but it is God who raised our will to life from the dead. Thus, the origin of our faith is always God, the one who raises dead hearts to life.

It is he who lays up our hope in heaven and it is He who delivered the gospel to our ears and secures us. It is the gospel which grows and bears fruit and increases in us. It is the gospel which grows and bears fruit throughout the world as it is heard and believed. It is God who brings us Epaphras' to announce His work, for they are fellow servants of Christ.

Do you see this? Why does Paul thank God for all of this in prayer? Because it is God who works, and He is worthy of our gratitude. Grateful prayer is the proper response to the gospel being proclaimed, the gospel being heard, the gospel being believed, and the fruit which it produces as it continues to be believed by us as the truth, altering our affections and behavior and lives today. It is all of God, so that no man may boast, even of his faith.

Paul continues in prayer, asking God to work now, too. To bring the knowledge of the gospel (v9) and through this knowledge, brought by God, to bring a life consistent with its truth (v10), to lead to us walking in a manner worthy of this message, asking God to strengthen us with all power according to His own glorious might, so that we might endure with joy and join him in grateful praise of the glorious and gracious God.

Do you know that God's glorious might is working to secure you who believe in Jesus? Do you struggle to believe that God is for you today? Do you wonder if *you* can hang on, if it is even possible for you to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord? Take hope, my believing friends, for God, whose might is infinite and unfathomable, is the God who works. Your hope is laid up in the heavens, untouchable by the frailty of your experience, the moments of your doubt, the intensity of your sorrows and fears. Fix your eyes on His strength and His goodness.

For, it is God who has delivered you from the domain of darkness and transferred you to the kingdom of His beloved Son. He has redeemed you from the darkness which you can still feel, by forgiving you for your sins, your weaknesses, your failures. It is God who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the holy in the light. It is not your perfect faith, or your perfect repentance, or your perfect experiences, or your esoteric feelings of joy that qualifies you. It is God and God alone, the God of grace and mercy and love.

And God's work of salvation, from beginning to end, is accomplished by Him uniting you, through nothing but dependence, to His supreme and sufficient Son, Jesus, the Christ. This union to Him, and Him alone, is what secures you. Your hope laid up in heaven is laid up and secure because it is secured by Him who is seated on the throne of God. Someone would have to defeat Him to rob you of your inheritance, if you are united to Him by faith alone.

He is the image of the invisible God, the exact representation of the infinite God. He is over all things, in heaven or earth. He pre-existed them and He made all that has been created. He holds all things together, sustaining them by the word of His own mouth. He is over all things because He is greater than them all. He is 100% God and 100% Man, the fullness of Godness dwelling bodily. He alone reconciles the created broken things to the holy omnipotent God.

Therefore, He is all that you need. You were enemies of God and Jesus is the only one who reconciles you to God as friends, as inheritors, as beloved.

Therefore, remain steadfastly dependent upon Jesus alone.

Because the purpose of the Scriptures, the ministry of the apostles, is the purpose of God's own work: that we might know Christ Jesus. This is why Paul suffers. It was why Jesus suffered, and their sufferings are intimately tied together in this one purpose, as are all the saints who struggle in the same

purpose share in the sufferings of Christ Himself as united to Him in all things.

This great struggle, for which Paul is in chains, is to proclaim Him, to announce the person and work of Christ Jesus as supreme and sufficient for the hope of man and the glory of God. Therefore, all Christian ministry is the work of warning and teaching all that we might present every person complete *in being united to Christ*. And our hope is certain, for God Himself is working with His own power as we strive to help others see Jesus rightly, in whom we know God. There are many who try and deceive us into thinking that we need something other than the finished work of Jesus, as if our destiny and the destiny of the world were up to us. It is not. It is up to God alone through Christ alone.

In fact, we received God's Work through our union with Jesus and this union alone. We do not receive God's work, the fruit of His labors, because we have performed well. We receive it by faith alone. That is, only through dependence upon Him. And dependence is not a work, but an unwork; not a strength, but a need. Therefore, Paul tells us in 2:6, that we are to walk, that is to live and behave, in the same way as we received Jesus as Lord. That, we walk by faith, just as we were brought in by faith alone. We walk in dependence upon Jesus alone. For, we have already been rooted *in Him*, and

we are being built up *in Him*, and we are being established in the faith through this union with Him.

But, we must beware, for there are many who give lip service to Jesus but who do not believe that the work of Jesus is sufficient or that He is supreme. They hold to earthly means, to spiritual principles that are not of God, but of the world, which are devoid of the sufficiency of the work of God in Christ Jesus. These people teach that you must add to the work of Jesus your own efforts and experiences and surrenders and prayers and maneuvers and encounters. They take their stand on having visions, and seeing things and hearing things from God, but they are devoid of the gospel, the good news of God's work through His Son, finished and seated in the heavens, ruling over all things. They make God's work contingent upon man's work. Such things are worthless.

For in Jesus alone all the fullness of Godness dwells bodily, 100% God and 100% Man. We do not need angels, or prophets, or visions, or encounters, or movements, or words of wisdom, or esoteric cleansings or purifications or rituals or experiences of ecstasy. We have already died with Jesus. You have nothing left to do to gain access to the blessings of God. You are already raised with Jesus by faith alone to newness of life. You don't have to add anything to somehow make your nature different. You are united to Christ Jesus by faith and He is sufficient for all things.

His work has brought you into all God's promises. God has given you life in Him alone. He has given you this life by cancelling the record of debt which was against you by nailing it to the cross with Him! Therefore, THERE IS NOTHING LEFT WHICH YOU NEED IN ORDER TO GAIN GOD'S SMILE OR COMPLETE GOD'S WORK OR EXPERIENCE THE FULLNESS OF GOD!!

If you are in Christ, God has already defeated all powers which are against you through the death and resurrection of Jesus. There is nothing left to defeat. So not be afraid.

Therefore, live in the light of your union with Jesus. He is sufficient for all things. Look to the heavens, where He is seated, because He rules over all things. Remember His rule. Remember His victory and resurrection. Entrust your soul to these things, not what you are experiencing here on earth, as the real things, the lasting things, the ultimate thing. Your life is already hidden with Him in God. That is already true.

Yet, there is also some things yet to come. You have died, but you have yet to be revealed with Him in glory. That is yet-to-be when He returns. Thus, we live in the already, but not-yet of the gospel. But, the not-yet is not contingent upon your experiences here, but upon His return, and that is all. Do not fall victim to those who would deceive you by trying to bring the "not-yet" down to earth, as if heaven had already arrived, or you are already glorified, a worldview in which suffering makes no sense. No, suffering is our calling as

filling up what is yet-to-be filled in our union with Christ Jesus, but it will come to an end at His return, and no sooner. We must hold this “already, and not yet” together. As we look closer at this letter we will look at this more, so do not fret if it seems strange right now.

Finally, we are to live in the light of our union with Jesus, as those who have already died to sin. We are to kill the evil desires in our hearts because we have already died; the things for which God’s wrath is being poured out and in which we all once embraced. But now, we have died with Christ, so let us be consistent.

Jesus Christ is the good news of God’s work for sinners, for the needy and the broken and weak. He is sufficient for all which is broken in you, all which is needy and messy and lost, all that is evil and wicked and immoral. He alone is the origin, the means, and the goal of our salvation and reconciliation with God.

John Owen said that our union with Christ is the gospel. I agree with him. Therefore, as we seek to hear God through His Word in the following months in the book of Colossians, let us fix our eyes upon the crucified and resurrected Jesus as our only and full hope.

Because when our heart is not deeply convinced that we are fully and completely accepted by God based upon the completed works of Jesus, then we unconsciously assume that it is our spiritual achievements, our

performance of some laws or performance, either spiritually, culturally, or morally, which we feel is necessary in order to truly to be secure before God or to know Him.

Only when I, the messy and needy failure, comprehend the sufficiency and superiority of Christ “plus nothing”, will I then begin walking in the Light and every one of my relationships will be transformed in hearing and believing the good news of the God who does everything for me.

I must see Jesus, the only truly perfect one, become sin for me. Though I need to be changed, He entered in to me and embraced me, even to the point of death. When I behold that Christ died for ME! For ME! I’m not staring at what more I need to do to somehow finish what He began. I see that MY sins beckoned him near, not pushed Him away, and MY sins were paid for by Him, so that I am declared right by God, not according to my spiritual achievement or activating some gift of power, but His work alone. He alone is worthy of my attention and affection!