

Colossians – August 17th, 2014 – Colossians 1:24-29

The tongue of a wise man makes knowledge acceptable (Proverbs 15:2). Very interesting, it seems like truth that is proclaimed should be received on its own merit. But it isn't. Humans are wired in such a way that truth is not always received on its own merit.

[Note to Jim: talk about the purchase of bifocals. No one likes to need bifocals, no one says, Thank-you Lord o bifocals.+ But then the decision as to where to purchase them comes into play. What might persuade a person to get the fancy no-line bifocals at the optical shop where I work, given that it is 50 miles from downtown Zionsville? My counsel as to what course they ought to pursue gains credibility when one discovers I have nothing to gain either way.]

This example illustrates what is happening here in Col. 1:24 ff. Proverbs 15:2 teaches that the tongue of a wise man makes knowledge acceptable. The wise man knows how to present truth in such a way as to be more influential. We humans need that approach. Prior to my salvation, I had several approach me with the, You are going to go to hell if you don't receive Christ, you are worthless without Christ, you need washed in the blood of the lamb, you sinner,+method. It did not win my heart. I was won over a different way, by a wise man who spoke more appropriately to me about the Bible as it relates to everyday life.

A wise man uses his entire arsenal to best effect, not to scam, but to influence for good. That is what Paul is going to do here in our passage today. In came the false teachers who were very smooth, slick, and persuasive. Look at Col. 2:4, I am saying these things to you in order that no one may delude you with their persuasive argument.+ Paul needed to counter these false teachers impact. And he had a counter to their persuasive argument. He not only had truth on his side, he had something else on his side and nobody could argue with it. Here is what it is.

Vs. 24 . I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake.+ What Paul in essence said, Listen to me my friends, I've got nothing to gain if you buy your glasses here, or at the mart (K-Mart, Walmart, Sear-mart).+ Paul was not being propped up with money; he was not gaining prestige by his message. Instead, if you recall where he was at the moment he wrote Colossians, he had been jailed for his message, for teaching the very words he is writing here in the book of Colossians. Guess where the persuasive, but false teachers were? They were traveling around making money and gaining local fame, as well as power, as a result of their ministry.+ They had something to gain, money and power over the people. Send your money into me,+they said, and I will give you the secrets to religion and teach you access to God.+

But Paul says, Wait a minute, my message has not made me wealthy, my message has not made me king, I am in jail right now. And frankly, I am kind of glad for that, you know why? Because that fact is going to help you see your way through this deadly theology you are hearing from the false teachers; and it will help you see which one of us is telling you the truth.+ That is exactly his point. Look o I rejoice in my sufferings, **for your sake**+(vs. 24).

Vs. 25 . Paul goes on, in effect, to say, I didn't choose to take on this ministry so as to get rich.+ No, no, no, **I was made a minister" (vs. 25)**. I am under obligation to preach the gospel, not to achieve fame, but because God placed the call on me and I have no choice. Look down in verse 29 a moment, I am for the purpose of *preaching truth to you* that I am

laboring, striving, according to His power which mightily works within me.+ But there is a burden that is involved in this. Chapter 2:1, %want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf.+ The Greek word for %struggle+is %agony,+where we get the word, %agony.+ So are you going to believe slick persuasive argument? Or are you going to believe someone who is in chains, whose life is on the line, who has nothing invested personally, in terms of immediate gain, you decide.

What is Paul doing here? He is using everything in his arsenal to persuade the Christians in Colossae, to stay on the right path and not get sidetracked into false teaching. %The tongue of a wise man makes knowledge acceptable.+ And in parallel fashion, Paul points to his **suffering** as proof that he cares about their best interest. He has nothing personal to gain and for that reason, they should consider his words as genuine, verses those who will profit from the Colossians. [Note to Jim: talk about the email from my brother]

It is interesting to me that %suffering+somehow is always involved in our growth process. Just before we look at that fact, note once again, Paul wants loyalty, in his Colossians friends, to Christ, that% what he% working for, that the Colossians (and us) stay loyal to Christ. In so doing, he wants loyalty to himself and his message. [Although, 2 Cor. 4:5, %We do not preach ourselves, but Christõ +] So, if they maintain a loyalty to Paul, they will maintain a loyalty to Christ. How can Paul be so sure? How can he know that his beliefs and his message is built on the facts? Because he personally had a vision of Christ, remember, Acts 9? Jesus Himself commissioned Paul, in person, and sent Paul to the Gentiles. Jesus taught Paul directly! Paul was confident of his message and that the Lord was on his side. But let% now look at some of the theology of this section.

The Theology of this passage

Vs. 24 (again) . %rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I do my share on behalf of His body (that is, Christ% body), which is the church, in filling up that which is lacking in Christ% afflictions.+ What is lacking in Christ% affliction? That sounds a bit bothersome if you don% understand what Paul is really saying here.

Please know this, Paul is **NOT** saying that, yes, Christ suffered, but you also have to suffer, in order to earn something on your way to salvation. No, he does not say that you have to add your own sufferings to the suffering of Christ in order to have a relationship with the Living God. In fact, he is at pains, everywhere, to say just the opposite. Remember last week? Christ% work of reconciliation (making peace with God) is a work of God (vs. 20). It is a work that was accomplished in the past. It is work that was accomplished on the cross. We humans can% add anything to it, we can just accept it. The Biblical teaching on this point is always the opposite from what other religions and the %cults+have to say about the matter. For example, listen to the top leaders from the Mormon Church, a cult, pontificate on this subject.

Brigham Young (Brigham Young!!! Do you know his stature in the Mormon Church? You ever hear of Brigham Young University in Utah?) taught, %for certain sins the blood of Christ alone would not avail and the person% own blood must be shed for atonement.+ Thus he recommended killing your neighbor, for his own good, if your neighbor came to you and asked for spiritual relief. That murder would actually be an act of love for your neighbor, so taught Brigham Young.

Under the section, "Blood Atonement," in the book, *Mormon Doctrine*, Mormon Apostle, Bruce R. McConkie writes, "...there are some serious sins for which the cleansing of Christ does not operate, and the law of God is that men must then have their own blood shed to atone for their sins," (2nd ed. 1979, p.92).

In the same article McConkie quoted his father-in-law, who was the tenth Mormon Prophet, Joseph Fielding Smith, as saying: "Man may commit certain grievous sins... that will place him beyond the reach of the atoning blood of Christ.... If these offenses are committed, then the blood of Christ will not cleanse them from their sins even though they repent. Therefore their only hope is to have their own blood shed to atone... (*Doctrine of Salvation*, Vol. 1, pp. 133-138)"

These are current day teachings in some branches of the Mormon Church. In 1978, the largest sect of Mormons, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), banned this teaching. But since the founding of the Mormon Church, the LDS has switched positions several times, so we may see this teaching come back into vogue in the years ahead.

Regardless of the Mormon view and others, this does not spring from Biblical teaching. So what does Paul mean here?

Note again that Paul is **NOT** saying that we need to do penance in order to show God how serious we are in our repentance. Some Christians think that after they have committed sin, especially a sin that is recurrent, they have to punish themselves for some period of time. That is, chant some prayer 51 times, climb up the steps of the Basilica Chapel on your knees, or don't pray nor read the Bible for 2 weeks, since beating up on yourself is what is called for regarding the committing of this sin. You have to prove to God how sincere you are in wanting to change by bringing suffering on yourself. **Have you ever fallen into that trap?** If so, it isn't approved by God. He simply looks for repentance and moving forward, not the self-punishment syndrome. Jeremiah 8:4-5 reads, "Thus says the Lord, Do men fall and not get up again? Does one turn away *in sin* and not repent? Why has this people turned away in continual apostasy? They refuse to return. God calls for repentance, not self-flagellation.

So what is Paul saying? He is saying that Christ's death once and for all procured our salvation and made us complete in Christ (Hebrews 10:10-14, "By Christ's sacrifice, we have been sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all. Every priest stands, offering the same sacrifices day after day, which can never take away sins, but He, after He offered one sacrifice for sins, for all time, sat down and perfected for all time, those who are being sanctified.") Hence, Paul's point is not that what suffering remains is to pay for personal salvation, but that **what suffering remains, remains, so as to expand the Church and bring about personal growth.** Here is why that is:

1. in order for the result of Christ's sufferings to become effective in our lives, we hard-headed humans often need suffering in our lives to humble us, to prepare us, to make us ready to receive Jesus' one-time payment for our sins (new believers thus expand the church's growth).
2. plus, in order for you to have personal growth even after salvation, Paul realizes that many times, suffering must take place, not to make payment for sin, Christ's sufferings already did that, but to prepare our hearts in humility to accept the dictates of the Almighty when it comes to lifestyle. Acts 14:22 declares that "through many tribulations, we enter

the kingdom of God.+ And John 13:33, %a this world, there are many tribulations.+

3. also, with the gifts that God has given us, were they not also accompanied by suffering, wecd all be egomaniacs, thinking we had the world by the tail (again, personal growth).

In other words, the type of %suffering+that we are looking at here is %suffering+that Christ could not experience on our behalf. We need it, so as to come to grips with our humanity. Paul understood what %suffering+is all about and his comment about %ejoying in my sufferings,+was made because he saw that it was %for your sake.+ Again, so that the body of Christ, in this case the Colossians, could see who was being truthful with them and they could grow as well as maintain the faith. That is suffering that Jesus could not do on our behalf. Our suffering therefore has a place in the growth of the church and our own life. And it is THAT type of suffering that is %lacking in Christ's afflictions+(vs. 24). He couldn't do that for us. The bottom line is: what suffering remains, in filling up what was lacking in Christ's suffering, is to expand the church and for personal growth.

Vs. 25 (again) . Paul did not become a king as a result of pursuing his ministry. In fact, he didn't even pursue it for personal glory. No, as Paul says it, %was MADE a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for (my riches? for my glory? no) for your benefit.+ If you recall, Paul's conversion was accompanied with some trauma. Acts 9 tells us that Paul was struck down from a blinding light, after which he was blind, and that Jesus personally spoke with Paul. I like to say, Paul was bludgeoned into repentance. He basically didn't have much of a choice. He said to Jesus, %OKAY,+and that was his part of the deal, sort of an %uncle+type of choice. Just as Jonah found it difficult to escape God's call for him to go to Nineveh, so Paul found it difficult to escape God's call for him to be an evangelist to the Gentiles. Thus, %made a minister,+it was %bestowed+(that's a nicer way than saying %forced+) on Paul. All %cult+leaders are personally wealthy, not Paul, he was in jail at this writing. [Note to Jim: tell story about Ron Hubbard and Scientology; i.e. two ways to get wealthy, illegally, or start a religion ò he started one, two years later, Scientology. Also, Victor Paul Wierwille of %The Way.+ The wealth he received from his cult caused him to say that it is proof, God was blessing his ministry, so y'all come on in.]

Paul, on the other hand, could say, %Are you false teachers personally gaining anything from your ministry? Yeah? Well I'm in jail because of mine.+ So who will you Colossians believe?

Main points so far

In case you've missed it, what have been the main points so far?

1. Truth is often transferred with other things rather than just truth, like kindness, and not personally being benefited when you are transmitting truth to people.
2. Suffering must be part of our personal growth and for the expansion of the kingdom of God, but it is not to merit salvation or make payment for our sins.

Vs. 26 . Picking up the last phrase from verse 25, %have been called by God so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God,+then vs. 26, %hat is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages, but has now been manifested ò which is, Christ in you, the hope of glory.+ That is the %mystery,+Christ, in you. I would give Paul an A+ in theology. I would give him a D- in grammar. ☺ Let's read the passage from the Bible to see what I mean.

The digression of thought that typically occurs with Paul, shows up in this verse also. But if you eliminate the digressions, the verse reads, %am called to preach this fact. There has been a mystery in the past, which I am now going to reveal. Christ is to be in you, even you Gentiles, He is our hope for the future.+ Bottom line, here's the mystery, %Christ, in you.+

That, “**Christ in you,**” is downright cool. The Greek word, “**mystery,**” is %mysterion,+which means, “**something which cannot be fully understood but is revealed as fact nonetheless.**” In other words, there is something mysterious about this fact, not fully understood, even today, but I am going to reveal the fact of it anyway. That is what Paul is saying here. There is something here that is big, it is beyond our full comprehension, but I am going to declare the fact of it nonetheless. And here it is, %Christ, is in you.+

There are two aspects about this %Christ in you+phrase that are mysterious.

1. Though I've read it, taught it, studied it, reflected on it, and believe it, yet I still don't get it. How in the world can God, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, dwell in me? I don't know. But just because I don't intellectually understand it, doesn't mean that I don't believe it, for I do. I can't explain how electrons run through that copper wire to turn that light on. I'll tell you what, I took a copper wire one time and held it to my mouth and blew as hard as I could, and no air came out the other end. It didn't. So I put that copper wire to the faucet and tried to run water through it into the bucket ~ no water came though. I don't understand how those electrons squirt through that solid copper wire. But I believe in light. (Some say they won't believe in God since they can't understand Him, but that's a smoke screen for they believe in all kinds of things they don't understand.) But the truth is, and it's a mystery, Christ is in you, and the Colossians! If that is true, then a.) you've got everything, spiritually, that you will ever need, right now b.) you've got hope forever.

So, to realize that %Christ in you+means that Jesus, the God of the universe, indwells us, well it is both mysterious and amazing. How can that be? But that is the %Christ+part of it. But what about this, %Christ is **IN** you.+ The God of heaven is **IN** you, I can see why this is incredible and mysterious. But also, %Christ is in **YOU**.+ Which brings us to the second aspect of this mystery.

2. The Jew would have never accepted some Gentile having the Jewish God so intimately involved (with the Gentile) that God could be said to indwell them, just like He was at the center of and indwelling the Jewish nation. The average Jew would have been repulsed by that! But Paul proclaims stunning news to the Gentiles, %The God of Israel is in **YOU**!!+ What grounds for rejoicing, Paul says. But not only the Jew, the Gnostic would be appalled that some common ordinary everyday pathetic %you+would have the glory of God dwelling within! The Gnostics taught that everyone needed **their** knowledge to approach God. But Paul says, %The Jews are wrong, the Gnostics are wrong, and this is a mystery, but the Christ of Israel, is also in you.+

And because of that, all men and women are the same. The Christ that is in you is the Christ that is in all believers, men, women, children, little boys, little girls, the rich, the poor, Whites, Asians, Blacks, Reds, the Egyptians, the Afghans, in us all. All partitions have been broken down with those who have Christ, because it is Christ that makes us valuable; we are the earthen vessel with the treasure inside (2 Cor. 4:7).

So, in Ephesians 3:1-13 (especially verse 6), Paul can say this, %o Paul, am the prisoner of Christ for the sake of you Gentiles ~ and I refer to this mystery, which was not previously

made known, as it has now been revealed ~~to~~ to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister ~~to~~ +

You can see how this Ephesian passage fits with this point that I am emphasizing regarding the phrase, ~~%~~Christ in you.+ In the days of Christ, He went specifically to Israel. But eventually, He said to the Jews, ~~%~~The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation (the Gentiles) producing the fruit thereof.+ It was a huge indication that the kingdom of God would go world-wide, coming even to Zionsville, IN.

Vs. 27c . ~~%~~Christ, is the hope of glory.+ You ever hear the story about the doctor who fell into the hands of a band of criminals? They stuck a gun to the doctor and said, ~~%~~our money or your life.+ The doctor looked at them and said, ~~%~~Gentlemen, I congratulate you on your moderation. My practice is to take both.+ *Think about it a moment* He took the patient's money and then killed him on the operating table. Get it? I like that. Now, the point is, in Christ we have both, 1.) everything we need for now and 2.) everything we need for the future.

Many preach a ~~%~~now+or a ~~%~~then+message. But Paul says, no, there is a ~~%~~present+aspect and there is a ~~%~~future+aspect. We have both in Christ, a ~~%~~now+and a ~~%~~then,+ (your money and your life). This has a practical meaning to all of us. Christ's indwelling in our spirits means that our present AND our future have been taken care of. But things that remain for the future may not be ~~%~~ours+today, yet they WILL be ~~%~~ours+because in Christ, we have it all, both provisions for today and provisions for tomorrow. Think of it in this way. The child who has a trust fund containing 100 million dollars ~~to~~ which will become his at the age of 21, is wealthy even prior to age 21. That child is rich at age 12, yet the manifestation of that wealth does not come until the future age of 21. In the same way, benefits that are ours after spiritual rebirth, may not become completely ours until some future date in heaven. Thus, we have both, even though not all benefits may be ours at this moment. [Note to Jim: give example of Kenneth Copeland and his healing ministry. He said, ~~%~~ou can hold back death forever, if you have enough faith.+ Ken was confused and that type of thinking can greatly discourage Christians. We need to be able to sort out the truth about what it means to have ~~%~~both,+and yet have a now aspect and a then aspect.]

So, with the phrase, ~~%~~Christ, the hope of glory,+Paul is distinguishing the future hope that we have in Christ from what is already ours. When Paul uses the word, ~~%~~glory,+he is talking about the other side, heaven, eternity. He therefore understands, there is a ~~%~~now,+~~%~~Christ in you,+and there is a ~~%~~not yet,+~~%~~Christ, the hope of glory,+even though we have both in Christ. Yet the manifestation of some of the benefits awaits a future date. This understanding brings a tremendous relief when the horrible burden of whipping up enough faith for healing gets laid on your back. Those who teach that it is your lack of faith that prevents healing in your body lay a terrible burden upon the life of those who face the end due to terminal illness. When it is ~~%~~ou+who can't muster the faith, the situation becomes hopeless for the one who desperately feels his own failure. But Paul distinguishes between a ~~%~~now+and a ~~%~~not yet.+ Yes, God heals in our day. And He loves to respond to the faith of His children. But there is also a ~~%~~not yet+that needs to be brought into play in regards to these physical healings. Paul identifies that there are future benefits that are ~~%~~not yet+in his phrase, ~~%~~Christ, the hope of glory.+