

– **TODAY we complete Colossians chapter 1. We've spent 11 weeks on our journey thus far...**

✠ Paul has had a lot to say and to kick us off today, I just want to remind us why we care!

– Why are we taking the time to look at this so close?

- We joke about how long it takes me to move us through this scripture... But there is a reason! This is rich, it takes time to really grasp and consider what God is saying here, through the Apostle Paul.
- NOW, It is TOTALLY possible for to overthink scripture, BUT it is also important that we not be in a rush. WE WANT TO hear, wrestle with, and understand what Paul meant to the original audience- Colossians- so that with that foundation, we can truly listen for the Holy Spirit to take this truth and bring it to life in our own stories.
- It is easy to say "I believe God's word", but only really look at the scripture we need to validate and back up our own traditions, tendencies, and predispositions.
- ANOTHER THING to be a Spirit led student of scripture, taking time to thoughtfully consider larger message of these ancient texts that we confess to be GOD'S WORD... and have open hearts and minds to be challenged, to learn, to be encouraged and strengthened.
- SO, as we prepare to close out chapter one, lets take a step back to the amazing promise we saw last week...
- The miracle that God has chosen to reveal to us, and THROUGH US to reveal to the world, the glorious riches of the fullness of God's word, which is that CHRIST IS IN YOU, and this is the hope of God's Glory.
- IN CHRIST, we are image bearers... and expressers... of the Goodness, hope, and glory of God.
- And now Paul says- THIS BEING THE CASE- because this is true... HERE IS WHAT WE DO.

Colossians 1:28-29 ^{NSB} We proclaim Him, admonishing every person and teaching every person with all wisdom, so that we may present every person complete in Christ. For this purpose I also labor, striving according to His power which works mightily within me.

– Looking at how we ended last week, and how Paul begins this thought, we see the great truth that...

✠ We are in Christ, Christ is in us, and Jesus is what we have to say!

Colossians 1:28a, He is the one we proclaim

- Looking back into the letter, we see Paul saying... THIS CHRIST, who is the creator and sustainer of the universe, who is the FULLNESS of God, THIS JESUS whose very life flows within ALL His people, ALL who have believed, THIS JESUS is who we proclaim. JESUS is both the sum and the substance of our message.
- A few weeks ago we made the point that ANYTHING anyone may teach about meaning and goal of scripture, about the nature, work, and purposes of God—if it isn't consistent with the teaching, nature and character of Jesus- principally as we see in the cross- we've got something wrong.

- *When Paul wrote the church in Corinth, he reminded them of his overriding focus behind everything he said- (1 Cor 2:2)... “For I resolved to know NOTHING while I was with you except for Jesus Christ and him crucified”*
- *IN CHRISTIAN CULTURE, in churches, there are many things we proclaim.*
 - *May talk about current affairs, issues around us*
 - *May talk about need to be involved in work to care for people, alleviate suffering... Things CHRIST IN US will lead us to do...*
 - *May talk about Biblical themes such as the end times, foundational stories from OT... We may wrestle with moral, social, and ethical issues...*
- *THESE CAN BE IMPORTANT... but as disciples of Jesus, our central, and most consistent message is CHRIST. That Jesus is our LORD, HE is the one who brings hope, HE is the one who brings redemption and restoration, HE is the one who brings freedom from the bondage of sin, HE is the one who brings life!*
- *SO, when we say CHRIST is who we proclaim, we mean:*
 - *The Good news of the gospel of salvation- the message that God will use to open hearts to faith*
 - *The ongoing teaching that scripture imparts to those who believe.*
- *This is key- When we first come to Christ, we have not yet learned all there is to know about Christ. Entering into faith is the beginning, and our exploration of the wisdom of Christ will last a lifetime.*
- *Paul said this himself several times- I’m still learning!*

1 Corinthians 13:9-10 *For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.*

- *You can Paul reflecting on his own life, the incredible revelation God gave to him, and all his experience of trusting God... and yet still thinking... I STILL ONLY KNOW IN PART! I’m still learning!*
- *We will always be learning, growing... and the center and source of our learning is JESUS.*
- *NOW Paul takes this the next step... CHRIST is who we proclaim...*

Colossians 1:28b *admonishing every person and teaching every person with all wisdom*

- *Two key concepts here... important to the role of spiritual leaders, but also important in the role we all play in each other’s lives...*

✠ Admonishing and teaching

- *ADMONISHING... also translated ‘warning’. This is strong word, implies there are times when our thinking – as Christians- needs to be corrected, even rebuked. NOW, this can make us a little uncomfortable, but Paul’s intent is incredibly practical and redemptive.*
- *Last week I shared how bad theology, unhealthy thinking, can be incredibly destructive. There are times- SPEAKING TO BELIEVERS NOW- that our thinking needs to be challenged. This should be done HUMBLY, THOUGHTFULLY, IN LOVE, but it is an essential part of a healthy Christ centered community.*
- *NT WRIGHT: “Idea of setting someone’s mind (thinking) into proper order, with the implication that it has been in some way out of joint. At times, positive teaching may not*

be enough: there is no telling what muddles Christian minds will get into from time to time.”

- *In the case of the Colossian believers, the muddled thinking Paul was warning against was the idea that Jesus isn't enough, that we have to add all this extra stuff on top of the simplicity of faith in Christ. BUT THIS can address many issues with the church and within our own lives.*
- *AND HERE'S THE HUMBLE PART OF THIS... there may be times when we feel compelled to 'straighten out' another person's thinking, and at the end of a healthy and spirit led conversation, it turns out that WE were the ones needing to be straightened out! This can be HARD, but it also is powerfully redemptive!*
- *This is the environment of the church Paul describes in Ephesians 4...*

Ephesians 4:11-16 *So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. **WOW!!!**¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

- *Another key observation... Listen again... what is recurring word...*

Colossians 1:28 *We proclaim Him, admonishing every person and teaching every person with all wisdom, so that we may present every person complete in Christ.*

- *EVERYONE... strong emphasis... and...*

† *Everyone means everyone!*

- *Think of well-known Christian teacher or leader... may hear someone say “WHAT A MAN/WOMAN OF GOD”... “I could never have that level of understanding or closeness to God”...*
- *If Paul heard us say something like that, he might grab us by the shoulder and say.. NO! THAT'S NOT RIGHT! THE WISDOM OF JESUS IS FOR EVERY BELIEVER! IN CHRIST there are NO spiritual elites!*
- *Theologian FF BRUCE put it this way “There is NO PART of Christian teaching or God's revelation that is reserved for the spiritual elite! ALL THE TRUTH OF GOD IS FOR ALL THE PEOPLE OF GOD”*
- *SPECIFIC EXAMPLE. There is a movement in some segments of Christian culture that has been around a long time, but is recently picking up steam. One name is 'New Prophetic Movement'... idea that God is giving new prophetic revelations to different spiritually elite people. The internet is FULL of these teachers, and they should be handled with GREAT discernment and skepticism. Much of the content of these 'prophecies' today are either political, or related to 'prophecy' of how the end times are immediately upon us- and these two often are intertwined.*
- *If you ever hear anyone say something like “God has revealed to me something He hasn't shown to anyone else”, BIG RED FLAGS should come up.*
- *Paul declares that IN CHRIST there is NO LEVEL of spiritual maturity that isn't within the reach of ANY BELIEVER, as we live by the Spirit in dependence upon God's grace.*

- **THAT SAID, it is also important to hear this! For even the most mature believer it is possible not only to be wrong, but sincerely wrong. This is why we need to always have hearts and minds to be learn, even to be admonished- but God's truth, AND this call into the fullness of spiritual maturity- this is for everyone.**
- **This leads to next observation on this point. Paul says-**

Colossians 1:28b *We proclaim Him, admonishing every person and teaching every person with all wisdom*

† **With all wisdom**

- **Point is this: As believers, our source of wisdom is Christ. In Christ- His life, teaching, nature & character- and most importantly in his sacrifice and resurrection- IN ALL OF WHO JESUS IS we see the greatest and authoritative revelation of God's wisdom.**
- **Let's say we are facing a life decision, and we are seeking God's wisdom. We may look at many scriptural stories, references. But for disciples of Jesus, THE GREAT QUESTION, the most important consideration, is WHAT DOES THE NATURE OF CHRIST bring to bear upon this situation?**
- **NOW, answering that might be a study. It may involve in-depth conversations with other trusted believers. It certainly will involve prayer, and a mind open to the Spirit's leadership.**
- **A wonderful source of wisdom in scripture is PROVERBS. Great study- pull up all verses in proverbs that contain the words 'wisdom, wise'. Over 110. One of my favorites is Proverbs 4:7...**

*The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom.
Though it cost all you have, get understanding.*

- **What's so amazing is that all of the wisdom of Proverbs is like a giant beacon pointing forward to God's gift of wisdom In Christ. For "the beginning of wisdom is this: KNOW AND TRUST CHRIST!" and this wisdom has come to us, we may grow in this understanding... not because it cost all we had, but because of the cost Christ bore on the cross.**
- **In 1 Corinthians, Paul put it this way...**

1 Corinthians 1:22-24,30 *Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom,²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

³⁰ *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*

- **And now Paul says... we are admonishing and teaching every believer with a goal in mind-**

Colossians 1:28c^{NIV} *so that we may present every person fully mature in Christ.*

† **Fully mature**

- **That's quite a statement. Consider it for a moment. God's goal for you- for me- for every believer- is that we would become FULLY MATURE in Christ.**
- **SO WHAT does this mean? Paul is going to occupy much of the rest of his letter answering this question, but for now just a few thoughts.**

- **When it comes down to it, the great measure of our Spiritual maturity IN CHRIST is that our lives express – in how we think, feel, and act... the love, nature, and character of Christ.**
- **Spiritual maturity means that we look like Jesus. AND the SOURCE by which this is possible, by which we live in such a way that expresses the love, nature, and character of Christ, is our own faith, trust, love, and dependence upon Christ.**
- **Another way of saying this is that increasingly, in all of who we are, we are led by the Spirit of Christ within us.**
- **And the evidence of the Spirit within us is... the FRUIT of the spirit. LOVE. JOY. PEACE. PATIENCE. KINDNESS. GOODNESS. FAITHFULNESS. GENTLENESS, SELF CONTROL.**
- **If I ask, well, what does this love look like? The answer is, ‘it looks like Jesus’. It looks like what Paul described in 1 Corinthians. We are patient, kind, we don’t envy, we aren’t proud, we never dishonor or devalue other people, we aren’t self-seeking, we aren’t easily angered, we don’t hold grudges. We never delight when something bad happens to another person, we love truth, integrity, and honesty... our hearts toward others is always to trust, to protect, to hope, and to persevere.**
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- **THIS IS SPIRITUAL MATURITY. To be like Jesus, because Jesus lives in us, and increasingly his nature will be the expression of our nature.**
- **In Philippians Paul says it like this. This should be a familiar passage, but listen to the emphasis.**

Philippians 3:7-15 *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

¹² *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things.*

- **WOW. One other thought here. Spiritual maturity is a JOURNEY. There is no shortcut to spiritual maturity, and it never happens by accident. I LOVE that Paul again here says... I'M NOT THERE YET! This is my goal, but it is a journey, it is a marathon race I will run until Christ returns or I go to him.**
- **THIS is journey of one day at a time learning to have open hearts to God, surrendered to God, hearts that desire to learn, hearts that are okay being challenged, even admonished, hearts that love God and understand that the greatest expression of our love of God is how we love God’s creation- chiefly, how we love people.**
- **In 1 Thessalonians Paul describes how this place of full maturity won’t fully be recognized by the church as a whole until the return of Christ.**

1 Thessalonians 5:23 *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

- *Hear! This is encouraging! In our experience of HOW WE LIVE, we are not perfect! (Not by a long shot)- We have NO PLACE FOR MORAL AND SPIRITUAL PRIDE! But, at the same time, Christ is leading us toward perfection.*
- *From another vantage point, In our Spirit, who we truly are, our truest identity, we possess, even more, we ARE the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST! THIS IS WHO WE ARE! And Christ is continually calling us, by His Spirit within us, for His righteousness to be the authentic expression of how we live.*
- *As I've said many times over the years, this is the journey, In Christ, of BECOMING who we already are. To be like Jesus.*
- *And now Paul says something that, if we really consider it, is just mind blowing.*
- *If Spiritual maturity is the journey of becoming LIKE JESUS in all of who we are, THIS THEN is possible- in fact it is ONLY possible, because Jesus isn't just our goal, our model, He is our SOURCE.*

✠ Jesus is our source

Colossians 1:29 *For this purpose I also labor, striving according to His power (CHRIST'S POWER) which works mightily within me.*

- *This is evocative language. The word 'labor' gives the image of working hard, striving with everything we have. Paul often uses the image of an athlete, straining toward a goal with every ounce of energy.*
- *QUESTION. If you run a race, what are you when you reach the finish line? IN FACT, if you are like me, what are you just a little ways into the race? EXHAUSTED!!*
- *This is where Paul's metaphor of the athlete takes a supernatural turn... because AT THE SAME TIME, the ENERGY, the motivation, inspiration, and power behind our perspiration, is nothing less than the POWER OF GOD.*

1 Corinthians 15:10 *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God (the enabling presence and power of God) that was with me.*

- *Need to make sure we're not missing the strength of this language. Paul doesn't describe his ministry as something he principally does with God's help. The image here- and in many other NT passages- is that GOD IS THE PRINCIPLE ACTOR, and God is acting and working THROUGH US, as we live in obedience and dependence upon Him.*
- *HONESTLY, in response to this I sometimes what to cry out- I DO CRY OUT- UGH!!! GOD! What does that mean! To quote Eugene Peterson, when he was leading his church through Acts, "In Acts it is clear that ultimately everything was up to God, but at times- trying to be a leader in this thing called the church, it seems like ultimately everything is up to me!" I'M EXHAUSTED!*
- *You don't have to be a pastor to feel this way. This is LIFE, and we all experience it. SO, WHAT DOES IT MEAN, what does it look like, for us to fully engage life as a disciple of Jesus, while, ALL THE WHILE doing so out of the energy, direction, LIFE OF Jesus?*
- *THAT is a whole other set of sermons and discussions. But just one thought as we close.*

- *There are times when God works IN US simply by providing the grace we need just for the situation we are in. You find yourself in a place of crisis- your heart and mind saying “I have NO IDEA how to resolve this situation”... but JESUS, TRUSTING IN YOU, that you hold the picture I can’t see... with whatever light and grace I have, without trying to pre-determine what I think the outcome should be- Jesus TRUSTING YOU I’m taking the next step. And after that, the next step.*
- *This is the choice of faith to believe, even when everything around us seems to saying otherwise- that the ultimately the resolution of our situation IS NOT UP TO US.*
- *HEAR! IN LIFE, be it ministry, parenting, friendships.... The goodness of Christ within us will inspire us to work hard... to be fully engaged, informed, honest with ourselves, to persevere, to be creative, to work hard with courage and humility, and the discernment to do so without being unhealthy.*
- *AND AT THE SAME TIME- all the while- by FAITH, holding on to the humbling but liberating truth that WE ARE NOT IN CONTROL. We have influence, but we don’t have control.*
- *YOU SEE, Paul didn’t make excuses for passivity by just saying “God will make it happen”... but he also didn’t imagine that it everything was dependent upon him, and in the process burn himself out with restless, anxious non-stop activity that ultimately does little more than just wear us out.*
- *AND SO, Because of his trust in God, Paul could work hard without the stressful motivation of pride or fear- and without the bondage of thinking that we control the outcome.*
- *THIS IS DEEP WATER FAITH, but by God’s Grace we actually can learn to let go of our performance based approach to life. We can learn to be people of influence while releasing our desire for control and trusting GOD with what happens next.*
- *By God’s Grace, we WILL be people who proclaim Christ. We will be people who desire the wisdom of Christ- who are eager to learn, even to be rebuked and challenged when that is needed, so we may continually grow in our journey of becoming fully mature in Christ.*
- *For this is the fullness of God’s word- the glorious riches of God’s mystery now made known, which is Christ is in you, the hope of Glory.*