

51-01-08.wpd --Perfecting People in Christ
salvation, incarnation, humanity, Christ, false doctrine
Colossians 1:24-2:5
God's future goal for redeemed humanity must begin in us now.

INTRODUCTION: (text as Scripture reading)

--[last week's message was followed by an exciting dream where God showed me a bigger picture of His plan in Christ than that sermon even touched on.] I could preach again on Col 1:15-23 without repeating anything I already mentioned. Instead, I'll try including insights I learned from reviewing that passage, as I continue on preaching through the rest of the epistle.
--[While at CFO camp, I heard someone say, "God made all of this beauty in creation for us." That sounded nice, but it didn't set well with me. I knew why when I read Col 1:16b, ...all things were created by him and for him.] Christ created heaven and earth for Himself, not for us. But humans are the most blest creatures in all of physical and spiritual creation, because we were uniquely made in the image of God as a composite unity of both those realms.

--[Charlie & Willy Wonka: Charlie just was glad to get into the factory, but Willy Wonka's plan was to have him run it] Christians often look at God's salvation plan through a microscope instead of a telescope. We get pre-occupied with getting into heaven, when God has a plan for us rule with Christ over everything, heaven included. WE ARE TOO NEAR-SIGHTED!
--Part of our near-sightedness is a focus on ourselves. We want to go to heaven to enjoy its blessings, but the only description I find about our activity in the afterlife is in Rev 22:3, No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. This verse is our eternal job description: serving God as citizens of in a jointly connected new heaven and new earth.

--What does this astronomically gigantic, future plan of God for humanity have to do with us now? It has to do with our relationship to the One who holds the whole plan together, which is best stated in v.28, "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ." (Title) That word "perfect" means several things, and all apply to this goal of being "perfect in Christ" [Thayer's Greek Dictionary: 1) brought to its end, finished; 2) wanting nothing necessary to completeness; 3) perfect; 4a) consummate human integrity and virtue; 4b1) full grown, adult, of full age, mature] **HOM.idea**. But we presently in a world of spiritual hostility and opposition. So, there's...

I. A Struggle in Perfecting People in Christ

- A. I've said again and again that almost every subject Paul wrote about in Colossians seemed to attack the heresy of *Gnosticism* (so, if he was repetitive, I will be, too, and explain it again [Gnosticism taught that God made the spiritual realm and a demon made the material realm, attaching our spirits to these physical bodies. They taught the spirit is valuable, but the body is worthless. They did not believe Jesus came in the flesh, but only appeared to be human. Gnostic teachers offered their disciples special knowledge or gnosis, which could enable them help divide their spirits from their bodies and live spiritually, based on that knowledge. {Joke: "Now, why I keep repeating this is because...there will be a test at the end of this series..."}])
- B. Paul's personal testimony about bringing Christians to perfection in Christ, mentions the very opposite of the Gnostic dualism (he starts by *lifting up* the part of our being the Gnostics *put down*)
1. v.24, *Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.* (This *body-friendly* verse sounds strange because of its *body-power* language verse; there is mysterious power in our *physical beings* that can be tapped for spiritual purposes.)
 - a. We are spirit-body beings, an organic, holistic unity of heavenly spirit and cosmic dust. (What affects the spirit affects the body; what affects our bodies affects our spirits.)
 - b. In the realm of *his flesh*, Paul said physical suffering released power to bless others, as Christ's sufferings did. [App: What do we do with our bodily sufferings? Offer them to Satan with anger, or to God with thanksgiving-- 1 Th 5:18, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.]
 2. In the realm of *his spirit*, Paul said in v.29, *To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.* (All humans have spirits, and spiritual energy, but the human energy in a Christian is energized by divine power from the Holy Spirit.)

TRANS: As spirit-body beings, our Christian destiny is to govern both the spiritual and the physical universe along with Christ. But God is not waiting till later to teach us how that is done. **God's future goal for redeemed humanity must begin in us now.** That's why there is...

II. A Strategy in Perfecting People in Christ

- A. The central focus of that strategy is getting us to understand and

live out our lives in the knowledge of (v.26) "*the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.*" What is that mystery? (v.27) "...*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*"

1. Whenever you see that word "*hope*" mentioned in relationship to salvation, think about resurrection-- Rom 8:19, 23, 24a. The creation waits in eager expectation for **the sons of God to be revealed** ... Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for **our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies**. For **in this hope we were saved**.
 2. We are God' children of by new birth, but our ultimate destiny as "sons of God" will not be revealed until we are like the Son of God, who is the "firstborn from among the dead"
 3. Do you know why creation is waiting for this *hope*? Because, it has been told about it-- Col 1:23, continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the **hope** held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been **proclaimed to every creature** under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.
- B. How do believer get "*perfect*" or *mature* or *complete* or *grown up* in the "*hope of glory*" in Christ? Paul said in v.2-3, My purpose is that they may be **encouraged in heart** and **united in love**, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may **know the mystery of God, namely, Christ**, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
1. We need to be "*encouraged in heart*," because we still can get angry with our physical and circumstantial trials in this world, when we need to offer them up to God in thanksgiving.
 2. We need to be "*united in love*," because our destiny is not "*my Christian life*," but "*his body, which is the church*," a new corporate humanity of resurrected "sons of God," serving *the* Son of God, who is "firstborn over all creation."
 3. We need to learn "*all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" in Christ, because false teachers abound around us, like the *Gnostics*, who, as Paul said in v.4, "*may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.*"

CONCLUSION:

--God has a great future ahead for us, but the King of that future is already living inside us. God doesn't want us to wait till we get there.

His future goal for redeemed humanity must begin in us now.

Col 1:24-29 (NIV) Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. {25} I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness-- {26} the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. {27} To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. {28} We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. {29} To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Col 2:1-5 (NIV) I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. {2} My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, {3} in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. {4} I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. {5} For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.