

## Session 3

April 28, 2024

### GROWING IN CHRIST

Colossians 1:9-14; 21-29

Colossians is an interesting book. Written from prison to a church he had never met, Paul authored the letter in response to some Christological issues the church was facing. Apparently, some there were doubting the deity of Christ, and therefore calling into question the whole redemption He offered. The apostle Paul used the opportunity to exalt the Lord Jesus Himself, and to expose the glory of His blood-bought church. In order to do so, Paul began by explaining his role in the church and his dedication to spreading the Good News. In this week's lesson, he makes three key points.

**Praying for good things (vv. 9-14).** The verses preceding our text commend the church at Colossae for the three greatest and most enduring characteristics of Christ's body: faith (v. 4), hope (v. 5), and love (vv. 4, 8). With such a firm foundation, it was easy for Paul to both encourage them and to pray for them. Notice the important mix of understanding and practice. These two essentials provide the basis of spiritual growth. Specifically, Paul prays that they might be filled (literally "crammed full") with the knowledge of His will, all wisdom, and spiritual understanding (v. 9). Why? So they might continue to walk in a way worthy of the Lord; that is, live an intentional life that pleases Him by bearing fruit, demonstrating good works, and growing in the knowledge of God. Beyond spiritual understanding, Paul prays that the church might have spiritual strength as well. Notice the increasing combination of words he used: that they might be "strengthened with power," "according to His might." The most surprising part of Paul's prayer is not that they might be strengthened to perform mighty deeds or work miracles, but rather that they might be strengthened to endure; and to do so with patience, joy (v. 11), and thanksgiving (v. 12). The remaining verses in this section highlight the great blessings that accompany the difficulties, making the church's trials worthwhile. For reflection: *Look at the idea of the domain of darkness vs. the kingdom of light. What does this say about the cosmic conflict we are involved in? How central is Christ's death in this bigger conflict? How central is the church's role?*

**Prepared for good things (vv. 21-23).** In verse 21, Paul reconnects with the dual themes of knowledge and behavior. But here, he uses a contrast. Once, these same believers had been separated from God and hostile towards Him. This was evident by the evil deeds they committed. A second contrast is found in verse 22: reconciliation and redemption are *spiritual* acts; yet Christ did those works through His *physical* body. A third contrast is alluded to at the end of verse 22: it was through His physical death, that we might have spiritual life. Notice the condition that Paul places on the redeemed: Christ has accomplished all these things, but they are appropriated only through steadfast and continual faith. Verse 23 is not meant to highlight Paul's ministry of evangelism. Rather, he is stating with all humility that he, the "chief of sinners," has been entrusted with the highest of honors: proclaiming the good news of Christ; good news that is to be preached to all of creation. For reflection: *Why do you think Paul makes so much of believers' standing before God as holy, faultless, and blameless?*

**Proclaiming good things (vv. 24-29).** Verse 24 is particularly difficult. At first glance, it seems that Paul is somehow contributing to the sufferings of Christ! In reality, he is expanding the sufferings of Christ to include the ongoing struggles the church would face. Remember, Paul was writing this letter from prison. He recognized that any suffering he endured was in the Lord's name and for the Lord's church (see Phil. 3:10; see also 1 Peter 4:13). It's interesting that in most places, Paul calls himself a "minister of God" or "minister of Christ" (Rom. 15:16). Here, his emphasis is on the church and his calling as a member of the church to complete the commission of the church: "to make God's message fully known" (v. 25). Yes, it has been a mystery; and yes, it has been hidden. But no more! As a servant of the Lord and His church, Paul understood that his life's calling was to advance God's kingdom through (1) the clear proclamation of the gospel; (2) warning the lost of coming judgement; (3) teaching godly truth with godly wisdom; and (4) ensuring the spiritual maturity of believers. For reflection: *Do some extra study. Why do you think the message of God was considered a "mystery?" What do you think Paul meant by saying it was "hidden?" How did all that work?*