

4/28/20

I have covered some of the topical issues I wanted to do as we began our studies together – issues that I felt were essential because of the time we live in and the circumstances we are currently facing.

Our first four studies had those goals in mind.

I want to introduce tonight's study with some comments on Daniel 11:32 which says, "The people who know their God shall stand firm . . ."

How much do you depend upon teachers, pastors and books to keep you going? Must you attend meetings just because you feel that the last lot you got has been used up and you must get a fresh supply? Or have you been emancipated from all human props and put into a place of glorious independence, because you KNOW YOUR GOD? It doesn't matter if you are plunged into the middle of the Sahara, you know your God and can stand independently of all-natural helps – this thing has become YOU! That is the kind of knowledge which overcomes the world. That is the kind of thing that makes all the other systems go down, and you rise triumphantly above them. That was the secret of the apostolic church. Let kings do what they like, let the people rage – it goes on, and it is the Roman Empire that goes to pieces before this thing, and not this thing that goes down before the Roman Empire. It is an independent personal knowledge of God, resultant from an inward birth, that lives. Not only an objective truth, but a subjective power, and it is a great day when the slightest fragment of known truth becomes a vital personal experience in its working ability. That is what we want. First-hand knowledge, not second-hand truth. May God work this into our very beings until it becomes us. Take it in fragments if you like, and ask the Lord to work it out in you and make it live in you.

I share that because as we move forward, it is vitally important, since we don't know how much time we have before free access to churches, pastors and even Bibles becomes restricted.

Our knowledge of God and faith in Him must become increasingly personal.

So, what I'd like to do for the next few weeks is move into a study of one of Paul's epistles; partly because of its comprehensive nature and partly because of several parts of the letter that have application to us in our generation.

So, we're going to go through Colossians.

As I've said in past studies, there is no book in the Bible and especially in the New Testament that wasn't written for a specific purpose. And most of the epistles were written to correct errors (whether behavioral or doctrinal) that had crept into the churches.

It's as Paul said in Acts 20:28-31

Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples

after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

The first letters Paul wrote were to the Thessalonians. Very early in the age of the church, the enemy had already begun to bring doctrinal leaven into the Body of Christ.

Because of their suffering and persecution, the Thessalonian believers thought they were in the Tribulation and had missed the rapture. So, Paul wrote two letters to them clearing these things up.

Satan always seeks to take advantage of what we are going through to misrepresent our circumstances to us. The classic would be Job. Job's friends, under the influence of Satan, were pounding Job with all the reasons for his suffering, none of which were valid.

They were basically lying to Job and didn't even know it – they sincerely thought they were helping him “see the error of his ways”.

Satan's greatest tool against the church is the Bible and he will use any part of it that he believes will accomplish his goal of creating doubt and discouragement.

This is why it's so important that we know the scriptures well enough to recognize deception when it comes to us.

For Colossians, Paul is addressing a set of issues contemporary to that part of the Asia Minor and establishing some incredible eternal truths regarding the relationship between Christ and the church. Paul peels back the curtain of time and transports us into the infinite councils of God in His Son.

I'll share one example of what I mean by this author who perfectly expresses the central theme of Colossians;

“There is one all-governing fact which runs right through the ages. It is that Christ is in all the thoughts and ways of God. Through all the ages, in all the thoughts of God, and in all the ways of God, Christ is central, Christ is supreme. Everything relates to Him, and everything connects with Him; Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning. If we could stand by the side of God and see through God's eyes, and become governed by God's mentality, we would recognize that God has but one thought and that one thought is influencing Him in every one of His dealings with us, with nations, and with the world throughout all the ages. That one thought centers in His Son and therefore the very essence of revelation, and the very heart of spiritual enlightenment is that you see Christ in all those thoughts and ways of God as they are expressed in His Word and in His activities. If you ask: "What is revelation, what is it to have spiritual enlightenment?" The answer is this: that you are able to see in a living and ever-growing way God's thoughts centered in Christ. We could put that in another way, and say that you are growing in your ability to see Christ and His place and His meaning in this universe, that this universe is interpreted and explained in the light of Christ, and that everything in our own lives in God's dealings with us, is connected with Christ in some way. That is true universally, and that is true sovereignly and providentially; it is true not only in the whole history of things in this universe, but true in a special way in human life. So, revelation, spiritual illumination, is to see Christ in all the Word of God; not just truths, not just doctrines, but Christ....We are looking for what is of Christ.”

And please remember, nothing can come through me from the Lord and nothing can reach the deepest part of who you are apart from prayer. Whatever we don't receive by miraculous, supernatural revelation, is nothing more than academic information – it's as dead and cold as the letter of the Law that controlled the Pharisees.

Our lives aren't changed by information, however accurate that information might be, but by the Spirit of God using the written word to form the Life of the Living Word in us.

As Jesus Himself told the Jews in His day (in John 6:61-63 & 5:39-40)

When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. . . You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

The letter to the Colossians has several secondary themes, but its primary theme is to impart a comprehensive revelation of the Person of Christ, focusing in this case on His deity, and of our relationship to Him as the church.

For tonight I'm going to spend most of our time on God's intended relationship between His Son and His church.

So, first let's make sure we know what the church is. Once we really see, in a spiritual way, the identity of the Body of Christ, a huge number of personal struggles and issues can be greatly reduced. The truth definitely sets free.

I want to read some excerpts from three different authors who, in their own words, have tried to communicate this to us – first, Frank Viola,

"From God's perspective, Christ is no longer a single person. He is a corporate Person. Christ and the church are a single reality. Paul's idea is not simply that Christ indwells and embodies the church. The risen Christ is a living, inclusive, 'more-than-individual' person. The church is a corporate entity that is made up of diverse individuals. This divine Person is living in and expressing Himself through His many members."

Now, Eric Sauer,

"Through the church shall be made known the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10). Through His body the exalted Head extends His life here below. The church is, through the Spirit, the continuance on earth of the incarnation of Christ. He acquires form in her, expresses in her His nature and the Head reveals Himself through His members. Just as the human body is the instrument by which our invisible, inner life, soul and spirit reveals itself, so also is the church as the body of Christ. Through the working of the Spirit the church is the means and organ of the self-revelation of the indwelling Christ, and therefore the instrument for making known His life and saving truth."

Finally, J.F. Strombreck,

“The church is to be conformed to the image of the One Who indwells her and to receive His glory. They are to enter into perfect union with God. This is infinitely more than harmony. The angels are in perfect harmony with God, but they belong a different plane. They are of another class. Jesus prayed that we would be one just as He and the Father are one. This can be nothing less than being elevated positionally to the level of God’s dominion over creation (note: not as deity, but as being placed in a position of shared authority with Christ in His throne; *“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”* This unity or oneness is not only organic as the body is, but is also a destiny of shared glory.).

In Colossian 3:3-4 Paul will tell us; “For you died (to what you were) and your (new) life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”

To give you one of many practical examples of these truths -

Once we see who Christ is and who we are in Him, we are no longer confused about the difference between us living for Him and Him expressing His own life through us. We know exactly what that means and how it’s meant to be done.

In the West most of what we call Christianity is simply believers doing the best they can to following the teachings of the Bible, in some cases ask God for His help to do this.

In other parts of the world, where the church has been broken of pride and self-effort, they are, as Ian Thomas puts it, ‘restfully available to God’ to do His will – realizing that “. . . it is God Who works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil 2:13) and that “. . . faithful is He Who called you, Who will also do it” (1 Thess. 5:24).

Without understanding the spiritual relationship between us and our Lord, the value of our lives and witness here is nearly non-existent for the simple reason that demonstrating to principalities and powers and to the world our own Christian dedication is not the same as them seeing “life of Jesus manifested through our mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4:11).

It’s the difference between Law and Grace, between self-effort and entering into His rest by ceasing from our own works.

In Colossians 3:12 Paul tells us,

(We are) God’s own chosen people, who are holy (set apart for His purpose) and highly loved by God . . .”

That’s where I want to go.

The foundation of our relationship with God and of His relationship with us is love; so, we need to know, as best as we can, what that really means.

The most consistent type or description of the relationship between the Lord and His people is that they are His bride. This began in the garden with the creation of Eve (taken from the pierced side of Adam and then brought back to Him) - and the image of the bride has been repeated more often throughout the Bible than any other illustration.

There was a book I read decades ago (and unfortunately no longer have) called *The Divine Romance* by Gene Edwards. The entire book builds on this theme.

It's sometimes difficult for us to see God as passionate in His desires, but we are created in His image, and in His Incarnation in Christ we see this reality demonstrated throughout the life of Jesus of Nazareth;

culminating in the Lord's own statement in John 14:9, "He who has seen Me, has seen the Father".

We need to see an unchanging, passion-filled God Who will stop at nothing to bring us fully into the wonder of His eternal plan for us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. God will ultimately accomplish all His will for us.

Along with His righteousness, holiness, and other attributes, the Bible makes it very clear that love is a major part of His nature and character. In 1 John 4:8, John simply writes, "God is love". And goes on to show that this love moved Him to make the greatest sacrifice even He was capable of making:

By this the love of God was manifested, in that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

Satan may have delayed humanity's entrance into the fullness of God's purpose, but he didn't cancel it. This is our destiny and the faithfulness and sovereign power of God will accomplish it.

Many of God's children are busy serving Him, many are busy studying about Him and preaching about Him and making requests of Him. All of these things have a place, but God is simply looking for people who will love Him.

The work of the enemy and even our own sins and failures have no effect on God's love. If you ever doubt this, jog your memory by re-reading the parable of the prodigal son.

God can be grieved and look out His window with longing for His child to return, but His love never changes – it's the same yesterday, today and forever.

As this author puts it,

"Do you have children? If so, what hurts you more; a senseless act of disobedience on their part or a sense of terror within them that you will reject them for their misconduct?"

You can see why, in a million ways, we really do need to get an accurate picture of our relationship with the Lord.

This is not just 'theology'; it a spiritual survival issue – because the enemy will paint a picture of Him that is contrary to the Bible; he might even use out-of-context verses to do it, so we need to be clear on these things and hold to them when we are under pressure.

Listen to these verses (I'm reading from the Amplified):

Rev. 12:10-11 / Now the salvation, and the power, and the reign of our God, and the authority of His Christ (remember Christ has become corporate) have come; for the accuser of our brothers and sisters has been thrown down, he who accuses them and keeps bringing charges

against them before our God day and night. And they overcame and conquered him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, for they did not love their life and renounce their faith even when faced with death.

Heb. 4:16 / Therefore let us approach the throne of grace [that is, the throne of God's gracious favor] with confidence and without fear, so that we may receive mercy (for our failures) and find grace to help in time of need.

Finally, Eph. 3:12 / In whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him [that is, our faith gives us sufficient courage to freely and openly approach God through Christ].

I love the way this author describes the apostle John's musings on the love Jesus has for him,

"I have seen, touched and experienced the love of God in Christ. I lived with Him for almost four years. My knowledge of Him was born out of first-hand experience. I knew the love that He had for me. It was unflinching. I was flooded and consumed by it. As a result, I found no power to resist the loveliness of the glorious Person. He has captured my heart. His love is all-consuming. As far as I can tell, I'm the Lord's favorite. He loves me more than anyone else."

John is basing his understanding on 24/7 observation for four years – why would we be less likely to believe him than *anyone* who paints a different picture?

As we saw earlier, what God has done to bring us to Him; what He has purposed in our union with His Son and the destiny He has secured for us all abundantly demonstrate not only His love (which John 3:16 says motivated all of it) but also the fact that we have been raised higher than any being God ever created.

And none of this has any to do with what we do or don't deserve – it's all grace and it's all eternal.

God has been planning this from before the foundation of the world.

He has foreshadowed the bride of Christ from the creation of Adam and Eve (where Adam says of Eve that she is "bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh" (Gen. 2:23) – which is the same reference Paul gives to the church in Eph. 4:31-32.

And He will bring to fulfillment all He has orchestrated in the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21, where the eternal city "comes down from heaven arrayed like a bride adorned for her husband".

I was reading through a series of articles by Sparks and came across these comments:

"We know quite well that our real battle is to maintain solid faith in God under the deepest adversity and suffering. And to raise no question at all about the love of God. That is the battle realm. . . We must recognize that behind all that is taking place on the earth at this time there is a spiritual system of things (to discourage and defeat our faith in our Lord). Satan recognizes the issue to be himself or the Church: These two cannot proceed into eternity together (one must reign and one must be destroyed). We are not without ample evidence that the present world events are not merely political and temporal, but are spiritual in their nature and essence, and are Satanic in their foundation. The smothering of Christ's life in the Church is the objective of Satan. God's purpose is the exaltation of His Son to the throne of the universe and the Church is called in, not only to share that exaltation, but to be the instrument in the working out

of that purpose including the displacement of Satan as the current prince of this world. When we are offered to draw near to the throne of grace to seek help in time of need, it is not intended to just for our own comfort (though that is certainly included) but to obtain help to be instruments of the Lord to accomplish His eternal purpose.”

So, in order to survive the deception of all that is visible and temporal, we must fight to maintain a spiritual and eternal perspective and interpretation of all that is happening around us and within us.

The love of God in Christ Jesus, from which we are inseparable, is meant to be the anchor of our souls.

I want to give you an example to illustrate this from Old Testament typology; in this case, the call of Rebekah to be the bride of Isaac.

I’m sure you’re all familiar with the story in Genesis 24, so I won’t reiterate the facts; I’ll just highlight the parts that have direct application to what we’ve been studying.

- Abraham, representing the Father, sets out to secure a bride for his only begotten son, Isaac. This is similar to the parable in Matt. 22 where it is said that a certain King planned a marriage for His Son.
- Abraham sends his servant, representing the Holy Spirit, to seek out the bride. From Pentecost forward during the age of the church, the Spirit is continuing the will of the Father and the work of the Son by seeking and saving that which is lost and incorporating each one into the body of Christ.
- Rebekah responds to the servant’s invitation with, “I will go”.
- Then begins the journey. On the way from Rebekah’s village to the home of Isaac and Abraham, the Spirit’s work is to progressively reveal the person of Isaac to her. Rebekah listened to the truth about Isaac as the servant described Him to her.
- Knowing what we now know about the rapture, it is no coincidence that Isaac is not at home, but walking in the field in meditation or that Rebekah lifts her eyes and asks the servant, “What man is this that walks in the field to meet us?” The servant tells her, “It is my master”. This will be the Spirit’s incredible witness to the heart of every believer when he sees his Lord.

Here is a description of this event given by J. Denham Smith,

“When the Spirit who is the great soul-gatherer has done His present work, Christ will come. This now is where our divine tale deepens in interest; for as quoted in Genesis, the “day breaks, and the shadows flee away.” Isaac has come; he is at sweetest leisure simply mediating. It was not in his home that he first meets her, nor was it in that which she had left. Their place of meeting was in the quiet field, and in the quiet hour of evening suited to the scene. Isaac had come from the well named, “the presence of Him that lives and sees”. He came alone, as if he would have undisturbed joy in meeting with her who he knew had left all for him. He came at evening time, near the world’s night; but to her it was as a morning of joy. And now she alights from the camel. There is no more desert now. No more dangerous steps and weary ways now. The time of her rest and joy has come; the long-for moment has come. For now, Isaac took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. We too shall alight from all our care, from all suffering, and from sin; and shall be with the Lord forever.”

In Rev. 21:4 we read,

(God) will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.