

9,16,20

We left off last week at Col. 1:9-11, so, let's begin by reading our passage;

“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy. . .”

As I said last time, the goal of studying God's word is not knowledge alone, but allowing the Holy Spirit to use what He shows us to form Christ in us.

We see this surfacing in Philippians also;

“This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.” (Phil. 1:9,10)

There is a direct tie-in between the increase of true, spiritual knowledge and the growing development in us of what the Wuest translation calls, “divine and self-sacrificial love.”

The Holy Spirit is seeking to make the word become flesh and blood; not just information; however good that information is. It's the life of Christ in us; that the Spirit is forming and expressing through us.

In just these two passages in Colossians and Philippians, Paul ties knowledge to 'walking worthy of the Lord' and to the steady increase of love.

You can see why the enemy so desperately wants to dumb-down the church by giving them either a steady diet of milk to keep them in infancy, or distorted and false knowledge to keep them from growing in the truth.

The accurate meat of God's word brings spiritual life and godliness – this glorifies Christ and makes us vessels fit for the Master's use. Satan will do all he can to prevent this from happening.

Listen to these comments by Sparks on this section of Colossians;

“Personal, inward, spiritual intelligence is a very rare thing. No wonder the enemy is so successful at delusions, counterfeits, and false representations. Our greatest safeguard against such will be a deep knowledge of the Lord. To know the Lord in a real way means steadfastness when others are being carried away - steadfastness through times of fiery trial. Those who know the Lord do not put forth their own hand and try to bring things about. Such are full of love and patience, and do not lose their poise when everything seems to be going to pieces. Confidence is an essential and inevitable fruit of this knowledge, and in those who know Him there is a quiet restful strength which speaks of a great depth of Life.

The absence of this real knowledge of the Lord has proved to be the most tragic factor in the church's history. Every fresh uprising of an abnormal condition has disclosed the appalling weakness amongst Christian people because of this lack. Waves of error; the swing of the pendulum to some fresh popular acceptance; all these have swept away multitudes and left them in spiritual ruin. These things are ever near at hand, and we urge the Lord's people to have very definite dealings with Him that He will take every measure with them that they might know Him in this way.”

As Paul is going to show us, when a spiritual comprehension of God’s Word is happening, our inner life, our desire and our motivation will increasingly be moved toward pleasing the Lord – bearing fruit for His glory.

Which in turn creates a desire for “increasing in the knowledge of God” so that the whole process becomes, in a sense, self-generating.

The more we truly understand of Christ, the greater becomes our love for Him and desire to know and please Him.

And the more we sense His pleasure in our walk, the stronger becomes our hunger to know more than we do now.

Which leads to vs. 11,

“ . . . strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy.”

Knowledge brings love; love brings motivation to please God, and motivation needs strength beyond our own for the accomplishment of what we now desire to do.

Learning to draw from His strength is something that is developed through patience, discipline, longsuffering and especially faith in the ultimate outcome;

Which creates joy as we think about how God is shaping us, like a Potter shapes His clay, both by what we are learning and by what we are going through.

The goal of *all* this is a new humanity perfectly conformed to the image of the Son of God.

The word “joy” or in some translations, “joyfulness” is where things get difficult for us.

Our faith tends to be a bit weak, especially when we’re under pressure; and when our knowledge of how all this works is limited.

Those two things coupled with the enemy’s unrelenting accusations against us, trying to convince us that our suffering is punishment, makes joyfulness hard to achieve.

I remember hearing a story of a father who pointed out to his young daughter that it was starting to rain.

She said, “Daddy, where does rain come from?” And he replied, “rain is God’s tears”. So, she asked him why God was crying and he said, “probably because of something you did.” – Unfortunate humor:)

For most of us, our suffering is not based on rebellion, but is being used by God to complete His work of perfecting us. As Stromberg explains it;

“God’s chastening is to correct and to purify. It implies imperfection, not guilt. Gold is chastened that it may become pure. Chastening, then, is to free us from the impurities of the flesh and the world.”

So, the bottom line is, we need to fight thoughts of God’ displeasure that rush in, so we can look at suffering from a completely different angle if we want to be singing praises to God in prison, like Paul and Silas did in Acts 16.

Then in vs. 12 Paul brings in “thankfulness” and notice what the reason for this is;

“. . . giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

No matter how much our knowledge grows over the years, ultimately our deepest gratitude will always go back to this – because of the grace of God and the sacrifice of His Son, we are going to heaven instead of hell.

Purely by grace, with no merit on our part, we are (as Peter puts it) “. . . the elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.”

If the Lord never did one other thing for us; this alone would fill our hearts with immense gratitude forever.

All you need to do when you’re tempted to doubt God’s love and compassion is take a few minutes to review what the Lake of Fire is all about, and the fact that you are safe, secure and destined to live in paradise instead of in inconceivable pain.

Listen these comments by F.F. Bruce and Margaret Cousins:

“If we understand that God’s action and attitude toward His people is characterized by unlimited grace, our response to Him will be characterized by humble gratitude.”

“(Thankfulness) turns what we have into enough. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, and confusion into clarity. It makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates vision for tomorrow.”

In the last part of vs. 11 Paul makes it clear that our lives are to be lived by God’s strength, not ours; “. . . strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power. . . “

As God forms Christ in us, to constitute us as those who share His strength as that strength is worked into our character, He exposes us to adversity and trial. He is working into us that which is according to His own nature.

He's building depth and substance in us. We're gaining a history with the Lord; just as those used most by Him in the Bible received over *their* lifetimes as *they* walked with Him.

This author felt the frustration of the opposite of this, and wrote;

“Oh, for Christians that don't need coddling and nursing and running after all the time; being pandered to, to get them to go on or stand up. Men and women like cedars of Lebanon. Do you want to understand why the winds are allowed to blow so fiercely? To get us away from cheapness and to make us people of weight. Adversity is the only way to deepen us, to put caliber into us.”

No matter where you look in the scriptures, you see this process in action in God's people. Some surrender to it and grow; some resist and walk away, like Demas.

“Now no chastening (lit. “training of children”) seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” (Heb. 12:11)

Before we move into the next section, let's make a couple of applications.

You've noticed Paul's emphasis in all his letters on spiritual vs. fleshly knowledge and how the one leads to corporate love in action and the other to self-righteousness and division.

What would it be like if the church were stripped of all the traditions, all the trappings of human religion and was reduced to this one simple thing – a family of people living in the Love of Christ?

Heaven will be the perfection of that “reduction” – taking away everything superficial and worldly, and reducing all of us to compassion and righteousness;

Heaven on earth before heaven in heaven – in a loving community of the redeemed.

What will be true in fullness in the kingdom of heaven is meant be seen, at least in part, in His body now.

And the way this happens is not through the establishment of mega-churches or Christian activities and programs, but the elimination of *everything* that does not

represent the love and integrity of God on the level of personal, intimate fellowship with one another.

This is why the first church met in homes and the remnant in the last generation, our generation, will meet in homes. You can't experience the kind of spiritual life and interdependence we see in Acts 2 & 4 in a large church building on Sunday morning.

What God is doing in this generation, to recover what has been lost, is simplifying our lives through pressure; not leading us in a pursuit of that which is more complex and impressive to Man.

Since the 1st century, there has been a 2000-year downward trend of the church – moving from our position in the heavenlies to an emphasis and focus on the earth.

Even though Paul tell us in Col. 3 to seek those things which are above, not on the earth – the church over the centuries has progressively moved in a direction that focuses them on the things of this world rather than the things of heaven; which is our real home and source of spiritual life in Christ.

God is using world conditions and individual pressure to set apart those in the body of Christ who will comprise the surviving remnant and who will be brought to a place of spiritual life comparable to that which we see in the first century.

Most of the church will be living in the spirit of this world – they will be Laodicean and will deny their deception and oppose the truth – they will *not endure* sound teaching.

The Lord is bringing His remnant to a place where their entire focus is on the three foundational realities of God's purpose for her to the exclusion of all else:

- 1) Growing in depth in the knowledge of the Lord so we can learn to be led by Him and to live by His indwelling life.
- 2) Praying to be increasingly equipped to reach those that are lost.
- 3) Sacrificing all self-centeredness in order to build up, to edify, the body of Christ.

We have *never* been asked to pursue any other course than these: It always comes down to these things. However, diversified our personal lives may become; and whatever the Lord decides to take us through in our training; all of this and more will be built on the foundation of

growing in the knowledge of Christ
reaching the lost and
strengthening one another in the faith.

If those things aren't happening, it doesn't matter what *is* happening.

Now, vs. 13-14;

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have the redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

After 2000 years of the enemy's development of the spirit of antichrist and the spirit of lawlessness, we are finally seeing the full impact of darkness beginning to blanket this world.

We see it in the global anarchy, deception, the movements within cultures, politics, and even within nature. Everything is changing and it's changing rapidly.

As we've seen before, this is true of the church also. The division within the body of Christ is related to terms like “asleep” vs. “awake”; growing vs. stagnant; learning sound doctrine vs. not moving beyond the surface; and ultimately, the purifying and deliverance of the remnant vs. the judgment of Laodicea.

We often criticize the world for their lack of discernment and for increasingly fulfilling the words of Isa. 5:20;

“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness . . .”

But the church has begun to do the same things; which makes sense, since the primary indictment against Laodicea is that they were deadened and completely oblivious to their true spiritual condition.

Have you noticed over the years that when you “see” something its like a light has been switched on? And when something you want to understand remains hidden; it feels like walking in darkness?

The kingdom of Christ is pure light; there is no darkness at all. There is no darkness related to truth or to moral and spiritual character. This is *our* kingdom. Paul says that this is the kingdom we’ve been translated into.

In Satan’s kingdom, there is *only* darkness, both moral and spiritual; there is *no* light.

Since we are in a heavenly kingdom, we have the opportunity to grow increasingly toward a place where our lives are characterized by light, by understanding, by overcoming and exposing darkness.

But the enemy is working frantically to bring the church into darkness and confusion, and to pull them into the affairs of this life, of this world – to prevent them for seeking those things which are above, *not* things on the earth, including so-called “Christian” things.

When he is successful; believers walk in darkness and begin to believe and propagate the deception of the enemy – they unwittingly support the spirit of Antichrist and join the movements of the earth-based culture they live in rather than remain faithful to represent the spiritual kingdom they are part of.

I want to give an explanation of how God intends to fully realize His purpose for us in spite of the work of the enemy and in spite of our weakness.

When God reaches His goal, which He planned before the foundation of the world, this whole creation, heaven and earth, will be united in a universal display of the glory of Christ.

God has purposed that, and God will make sure it happens.

But for the moment, our desire is to understand how everything we are going through is related to that purpose. God always has His goal in view and literally everything He does in our lives, and everything He says to us, is tied to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That explains literally *everything* in the Word of God.

To understand the mysteries and frustrations of our lives, we have to understand why these are the processes that God uses to reach His goal; and to do that, we have to first understand what His goal is.

Rather than constantly crying out “why?! Lord; why did you let this happen to me, why are you doing this to me!?”. Instead we find ourselves saying; “because of what you’ve shown me in your Word, as incredibly hard and painful and seemingly impossible this is; it makes perfect sense in the light of your purpose for me in Christ.”

Once that’s clear, everything that happens to us, however confusing or unexpected it may be, makes sense as we see it in the light of what God is after.

If these are things you have experienced and cried out to the Lord about, please try to track with me as we break this down.

The place that we ultimately arrive in the revelation of the eternal purpose of God is heaven and earth united in the revelation of the glory of Christ.

For that to happen, God has to remove whatever is in this current creation that does not express the character of Christ.

As we all know, there is a huge emphasis on the cross in the letters of the New Testament. Part of it, of course, is the sacrifice of Christ which accomplished the forgiveness of our sins, but the other part is what the cross represents in our lives now.

Keep these passages in mind as we go into this;

“I have been crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20)

“We are delivered unto death daily, that the life of Jesus might be made manifest through our mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4:11)

“So then death works in us, but life in you” (2 Cor. 4:12)

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17)

What do all these have in common – what are they saying to us in a practical way?

Sanctification is the application of the cross, not for our sins plural, but to our nature from Adam, to our flesh, to break its power and raise us above it's pull.

This is what it means to be "delivered unto death daily". It's the removal of everything from us that's not the express image of Christ in us.

God's dealings with us are toward that ultimate goal. All this discipline, this chastisement, these sufferings, are all to bring about the absolute transparency, and purity of the nature of the Lord Jesus in us.

The Lord is doing that by a personal application of what was accomplished at the Cross. He is clearing away the impurity of the natural life, the old man; removing the corruption and pollution, getting a pure heart and soul in us, a condition of our character which is the nature of Christ in us.

Conformity to the image of His Son is the formation of divine morality in us. Not a morality that *we* could ever achieve.

When we set about to imitate what we know of the character and integrity of Christ, what we end up with is self-righteousness; it's legalism and religion. That will *always* fall short of what God is after.

Sanctification is God's work in us. For us the issue is not imitation, but *cooperation*. It is so important grow in our cooperation with God's work in us - to understand what 'cooperation' by faith is really all about.

"It is God who works in you . . ." (Phil. 2:13) and "May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess. 5:23)

So, eventually, when this life is over and the work of the indwelling Spirit is completed, the body of Christ will be the universal manifestation of Him in His moral and spiritual perfections in a people whom He has brought to glory.

It is preparation of a people who will govern creation with the character of Christ in full measure.

So, what is the relationship between surrender to God in time to governing with Him and expressing His glory in eternity?

Since this process is at work in all believers and all of us will be perfectly conformed to Christ, why are there different glories of Christians in eternity?

We will all be sinless; from Demas to Paul. The flesh will be completely removed. All of us will have taken on the moral character of Christ.

But the *measure* of that character formed in us during our lives here will determine the measure of the outshining of that glory in eternity, and will also determine whether we will have the honor of sharing His throne.

If we *do* have that privilege, then the extent of each of our governing responsibilities will also be decided by our surrender to the training we received in time.

“And he said unto him, Well done, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities.” (Luke 19:17-19)

“There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differs from another star in glory. So also, is the resurrection.” (1 Cor. 15:41-42)

So, though all believers will express the glory of the Lord in some measure, only those who are overcomers (as we saw last week) will reign with Christ and glorify Him in a higher expression or measure of His glory in His kingdom.

For the overcomers who increasingly cooperate with the Spirit’s work of sanctification and God’s application of the cross in our lives through the pain and endurance it takes to reduce the flesh and increase the character of Christ in us, their reward in eternity will more than compensate for the struggles we have now.

“He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:30)

This next verse, hopefully, will take on a whole new meaning for us now,

“For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.” (2 Cor. 4:17)

This is why there are so many exhortations in the scriptures for us to rejoice when we find ourselves in trials and tribulations.

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1:2-4)

“We also rejoice in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope” (Rom. 5:3-4)

If we know and believe these things, rejoicing in suffering is not insanity like the world thinks it is, it’s totally understandable because we know where all this is going; we know *exactly* why it’s happening.

As a side note; you can now see why Satan has raised up so-called Christian leaders like Bill Johnson or Joel Osteen or Benny Hinn, and churches like Bethel and Hillsong and Elevation Church. It’s his way of removing the cross and the glory from God’s people. It’s his vain attempt to keep the overcomers from overcoming and crushing him under their feet at the return of Christ. He’s trying to pull the church down, away from divine viewpoint, into the world’s desires and viewpoint.

So, from our side, I guess the test would be – how badly do we want what our Savior wants? Whose interests are we most committed to; ours or His?

God must ensure that the last trace of all that came in by Lucifer to this fallen race is eliminated from creation. Death in all its forms was the first thing to come in through him and Paul tells us that the last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Cor. 15:26).

All that is not Christ is death and *all* of that has to be removed from us and ultimately from creation itself.

As C.S. Lewis put it, “Out Satan must go; every hair and feather.”