

7,14,20

Let's start with some headlines from multiple news sources – see if you can pick up an underlying theme. I'm going to inundate you with these for a reason that we'll see in a few minutes;

CBS: Tougher rules, new lockdowns around the world as COVID spreads

The Hill: World Health Organization chief: Pandemic 'going to get worse and worse and worse'

The Sun News: A United Kingdom Publication: Fears coronavirus will spark brain damage epidemic

FOX News: Refrigerated trucks requested in Arizona & Texas as morgues reach capacity amid COVID-19 surge

Newsweek: Scans Reveal Heart Damage in Over Half of COVID-19 Patients in Study

CBSN News: Woman Still Battling 100 DAYS After Diagnosis; a Terrifying Virus to Have

New York Post: Colorado town threatens a year in jail for residents who refuse to wear masks

Axios News: Dr. Fauci says that states with outbreaks should “seriously look at shutting down”

New York Times: Churches Now Major Source of Coronavirus Spread

CNN: Three Arizona teachers who shared a classroom got coronavirus. One of them died. (See? now the death rate is 'one in three'.)

CBS: Texas County to Arrest Covid-19 Positive Resident Who Refuse to Self-Isolate

CNN: Ferocious US Surge Adds 1 Million New Coronavirus Cases in 28 Days to top 3 Million

Alt Market News: Is America Heading for Civil War?

World Net Daily: BLM Co-Founder says, “Whites are subhuman genetic defects” and prays Allah Will Help Her Not to Kill Them

Fox News: Top Chinese Researcher Says Coronavirus is Only the “Tip of the Iceberg”

Campus Reform: Young Americans willing to give up First Amendment rights to avoid offending others

Gateway Pundit: Biden Announces Police Have Become the Enemy and Calls for Defunding

Finally, ABC News: Squirrel tests positive for bubonic plague in Colorado

Welcome to the world's 'media bombardment machine'.

I'm sure most of you have read C.S. Lewis' "Screwtape Letters". It's a fictional book about Satan's conversations with his underlings; it's got amazing insights.

So, let's take a hypothetical in that format.

Suppose your goal was to somehow get an ID chip into every person in the world so you could control and track them; but you wanted to do it in a way that would be voluntary (at least for the majority) and would result in those who got the chip being grateful they had it.

So, as Satan, you gave that assignment to the principalities and powers you ruled over. The following appears to have been the plan they came up with:

Step one: Create and release a pandemic that will make everyone on earth fear for their health

Step two: Escalate your control over the media and spread disinformation

Step three: Shutdown the economy to add the fear of financial survival

Step four: Rollout a mandated vaccine worldwide which will include a personal identification chip, with immunization information to prove whether we've all actually *received* the vaccine, making it possible to literally track everyone on the planet

Finally, Step five: initiate Martial law and checkpoints, to ensure worldwide compliance

Now, everyone has the tracking device literally in them; they are grateful that you've saved them from the virus and they are even ticked off at those who resisted the vaccine.

Mission accomplished!

Fear of death is an incredible powerful thing – which is why Heb. 2 tells us that through death, Christ freed those, who through fear of death, were all their lifetimes subject to bondage.

In this whole process we just looked at, the powers that manipulate and deceive this world have created and maintained fear and chaos at the highest level possible. Why is that so important?

Because the Antichrist conquers by bringing peace to a world begging for safety. The citizens of the earth worship him voluntarily – they absolutely love him (at least at first).

Fear has to grip this world at a level high enough to cause overwhelming gratitude when the Antichrist appears and replaces that fear with a global sign of relief.

This is from Dr. Tony Evan's commentary on Rev. 6:

"The rider on the white horse is a geopolitical leader who inserts himself in the world following the rapture and brings order out of chaos. This person will claim victory – represented by his white mount and crown- and will gain world power. There is no mention of an arrow with his bow indicating the bloodless nature of his coup. He will assume power through his strength, recognition and substance, but without resorting to violence.

There are a couple of other verses we need to tie into Dr. Evan's comments:

Daniel 8:25; "And through his cunning, he shall cause deception to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many . . ."

And 1 Thess. 5:3; “When people are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.”

The architects of the New World order are in the accelerated process of constructing the global system that will make all of this possible – which means that we are extremely close to the removal of the church.

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Ok, we left off at Col. 1:19 last week; let’s read through the next section; verses 20-23.

“. . .through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—if you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, as made a minister.”

This is the section I mentioned a few weeks ago when I did a study on the Bema Seat. To understand this part of Colossians, we first needed to be settled on the fact that whatever happens at the judgement seat does *not* affect our salvation.

The “if” in vs. 23 needs some explanation because commentators have used this, and similar passages, to scare believers into a works-based system where they end up using their own self-righteousness to give them a personal assurance of salvation.

The first part of this section in Colossians establishes something we are all familiar with – that the death of Christ brought about the reconciliation of even the most ‘alienated and hostile’ among those of us who have trusted in Him.

This is foundational and all of us know this as the basis of our salvation – it’s not what *we* did; but what *He* did *for* us. He’s the Savior; not us. We’re the recipients of grace, not the source.

But last week we also saw in Romans 8 that creation itself, not just humanity, was alienated from God and needed be brought back to Him.

So, the work of Christ on the cross involved a universal ‘bringing back’ or ‘recovery’ which will ultimately be realized at His second coming when “creation itself will be set freed from bondage by the revealing of the sons of God.”

What about the “things in heaven” mentioned in Col. 1:20?

The death, resurrection and ascension of Christ brought about not only the bringing to Himself of believing humanity, but it also conquered and “subdued” His enemies.

Col. 2:15;

“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

Probably the passage we’re most familiar with that shows this is Phil. 2:8-10. Listen to these verses in light of what we’ve seen so far;

“Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason, also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”

“Bowing the knee” is done voluntarily by those who come to Christ, but involuntarily by those who do not. Either way, “every knee will bow”.

This was also an outcome of the cross and resurrection of our Lord. The incredibly far-reaching impact of the death and resurrection of Christ is beyond what most of us can even comprehend.

That cosmic event impacted every element of creation and laid the foundation for the complete removal of all that is not of Christ as well as eventually incorporating into the new creation all that perfectly represents Him.

Now, let’s see if we can make sense of the “if” clause in vs’s 22-23. It appears that to be -

“. . . present(ed) before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach”, we are required to “continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard.”

The “if” in this verse is a “first class condition” which assumes the reality of the premise. We could say that Paul is confident in his audience. He’s saying, “if, and I assume it’s true of you . . . “

Paul is going to lay this out as a test, but he assumes they will pass.

Sometimes the way other verses in the Bible state this same idea can help make it clearer. Here’s the way Peter explains it in 1 Pet. 1:7;

“So that the tested proof of your faith—more precious than of gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Also, 2 Pet. 1:10-11;

“Therefore, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be provided for you an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

When Christ returns, those who, “Press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (as Paul describes it in Phil. 3:14), will receive praise, honor and glory at His appearing.

We need to also see what the words “holy”, “blameless” and “beyond reproach” mean in the original. I’ll be drawing from Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament:

“Holy” simply means “pure, clean, innocent, consecrated”.

“Blameless” is “without spot or blight – morally, spiritually unblemished; without flaw.”

And “Beyond reproach” refers to the unsuccessful result of “making legal charges against someone in a court of law . . . when scrutinized, the person is not convictable; he is unimpeachable.”

We spent a great deal of time in our Bema Seat study looking at what, specifically, will be examined. But the contribution Paul makes to the Colossians on this, is to point out the need to “continue in the faith” and “not (be moved) away from (our) confidence in the Gospel.”

When you see a definite article in front of faith in the Bible, it’s not talking about the act of believing but about *what* is believed.

So, “the faith” here would be the full realm of doctrinal truth that guides our lives as believers, or as Jude put it, in Jude vs. 3;

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for *the faith* which was once delivered unto the saints.”

Since we’re living in a time when people will not endure sound doctrine, this becomes especially important for us to remember.

Now, let’s look at Col. 1:24;

“I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.”

Have you ever read that verse and wondered what could be “lacking in Christ’s afflictions” and how Paul could “fill that gap”?

Before we look at what Paul means, here are some other verses that are saying the same thing in different contexts.

(2 Cor. 1:5,8) For as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. . . For we do not want you to be unaware of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.”

The wording in Col. 1, as well as 2 Cor., makes it clear that we are not simply talking about suffering in this life *in a similar way* in which Christ suffered when He was here – like persecution or loneliness or temptation.

Paul says that he had entered into “*Christ’s afflictions*” and in his letter to the Corinthians, he says that the *present-tense* sufferings of Christ are his in abundance.

How is that possible?

Is Christ still suffering, personally, in His people or is it simply a metaphor for the Lord’s willingness to empathize with us, since He had experienced the same things?

In 1 Cor. 6:17 Paul writes, “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him”. And as L.E. Maxwell puts it, “This is no mere mechanical thing, no mere legal position. I am actually and vitally joined to Christ, and He to me.”

Another author puts it this way,

“What, then, is the Church? Let us not think of it as something somewhere outside of and apart from ourselves. The answer is a very simple one. The Church is Christ Himself, not Christ personally alone, but Christ in you and in me. It is just here that all the mistakes have been made about the Church, with such disastrous results. The Church is simply Christ Himself living in all those in whom He dwells. That is all. That is the Church. Seek to root out of your mentality any other idea of the Church. It is Christ in you and in me that is the Church. It is the measure of Christ formed in us that constitutes the Church, the one Christ by the one Spirit in all those in whom He dwells. That is the Church.”

In Eph. 5:29-32 Paul references Gen. 2:23 and the relationship between Adam and Eve – She was called flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone. In Eph.5 Paul writes,

“For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.”

When speaking to those who persecuted Israel, such as Pharaoh, Jehovah said, “Let my people go!” (Ex. 9:1). But notice the change of wording when Christ addresses those who persecute the church,

“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting . . .*” (Acts 9:1-5)

This is in perfect alignment with other passages regarding the relationship between Christ and the church.

And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women. (Acts 5:14)

The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (Acts 2:47)

To be added to the church is to be added to the Lord.

Paul makes this statement in 1 Cor. 12:12: and listen carefully to the wording: “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ.”

And in Eph. 3:4; “By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ.”

Christ is now corporate; He is both head and body. Which is why, as Paul explains in 1 Cor. 12; the Head experiences the suffering of each member of His body.

Being joined to Christ in this way doesn't make us deity. We are in union with the glorified humanity of Christ, not the transcendent deity of the Trinity.

So, in our Colossians passage, what does it mean to "fill up what is lacking" of these sufferings of Christ? Why is it necessary that the sufferings of Christ would continue throughout this age in His church?

Christ personally, as the Head of His body, has always been, and still is, absolutely sinless. However, using Paul's analogy in 1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 1:23, in the rest of the body, imperfection is rampant.

That would be you and me.

So, Christ in His humanity was brought to full spiritual maturity as a Man through suffering. This is made clear in Heb. 2:10;

"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered."

You and must also be brought to the place where sin is removed from us so that we are fully conformed to the moral purity of Christ. It will take all our lifetime plus the resurrection of our bodies to get us there. But the "how" of this is Paul's point in Colossians.

In H. G. Moule's commentary on Colossians, he writes this:

"There is no suggestion here of any supplement added by Paul to the unique sufferings of Christ in His atoning death; a sorrow and labor in which the Lord stood absolutely alone, unapproachable forever by any or all of His people. The reference is to the shame and persecution of the Lord's life and labor as the apostle of our profession.

The Lord only 'began to do and to teach' in His humanity, but would personally carry on this life through His members which would remain incomplete as His flock would continue to 'fill up' what remains of that incompleteness unto His coming."

So, we don't just suffer for Him; He also suffers with and in us as He continues to build and purify His body bringing many sons to the glory that He intends to ultimately share with us.

Every time you and I experience affliction because we are growing in Christ, and have become the object of antagonism to fallen angels and rebellious humanity, we are corporately, progressively moving toward the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

This is just another out of a million reasons to be thankful for what we go through, knowing that *this* is the outcome; and to trust Him with the process because He is the only One who knows exactly, specifically, what is needed in each our lives to bring us into final conformity to Christ.

In James 5:5, he says that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Suffering (and often failure) breaks us; it reveals and crushes our pride. It takes away our perceived right to consider ourselves superior to others, because under pressure we see ourselves as we *really* are – spiritually bankrupt apart from the grace of God.

Suffering can increase compassion because we becoming increasingly aware of the pain of others and instead of just sympathizing with them, we can now empathize because we know how it feels. It's no longer 'theory' to us; it's a real and it's personal.

Listen to this passage in Job 23:8-10:

"I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not see him; on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come out as gold."

All the impurities will be burnt away and all that will be left is who we are as God's new humanity. It will finally be "Christ in you, the hope of glory".

Somehow, these things need to become ours, in the deepest part of who we are. As long as it's just encouraging information floating around the surface of our thoughts, we will always have doubts instead of assurance.

Because of what all of us are going through and because of what's coming, the peace of God which passes understanding has to penetrate our souls. But how?

I'm going to close by sharing some thoughts on this from an essay by C.H. Mackintosh. First, I want to set the stage with a couple of verses in John 20 and 1 Pet.1;

"So, when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord." (Jn. 20:19-20)

". . . and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory." (1 Pet. 1:8)

Now, Mackintosh's comments;

"Peace is to have application to the inner life. At the cross of Christ, all was finished. The battle was fought, the victory gained. The Conqueror is in our midst. All possible ground of anxiety is forever removed. Peace was made, and established on the basis which could never be moved. It is utterly impossible that any power of earth or hell could ever touch the foundation of that peace which a risen Savior is now breathing into the souls of His disciples. He made peace by the blood of His cross. The full tide of Jehovah's righteous wrath against sin had rolled over Him. The triumph was gloriously complete; and the blessed Victor presents Himself to the hearts of His beloved people, and sounds in their ears the precious words "peace I give to you".

But the secret of peace is more than knowing our sins are forgiven and that we are justified from all things, blessed as all this assuredly is. It is having before our souls, before the eyes of our faith, the Person of a risen Christ, and receiving from His own lips the sweet message of peace. It is having in our hearts that holy sense of deliverance which springs from having the Person of the Deliverer distinctly presented to our faith. It is not merely that we know our sins are forgiven, but our hearts are livingly engaged with the One Who has done it all, and we gaze by faith upon the mysterious marks in His body of His accomplished work. This is peace for the inner life.”

Ok, last scriptures for tonight to sum this up:

Matt. 11:27-29

“All things have been entrusted to Me by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. Come to *Me*, all you who are weary and burdened, and *I* will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of *Me*; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”