

9,8, 20 Col. 2 vs. 1-3

We're going to be looking at Col. 2: 1-3 tonight. I want to intro this section with Eph. 1:18 and some comments on this verse by Sparks: "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you. "

"It is a seeing of the immense significance of Jesus in the eternal and universal order. With the Apostles that seeing was subsequent to the days of physical association. During the forty days after His resurrection it was like the dawning of a new day. First, as when the uncertain light just passes over the heavens. Then more steady and certain rays, leading to the Day of Pentecost, when the sun appeared in full glory over the horizon dispelling the last shadow of uncertainty. On that day they saw Him as by an opened heaven. The mystery of the past was dispelled. The Bible lay open like a new book. They saw Him in the light of eternity. They began to see that, while He was the glorified, personal, Son of God, He was Himself the embodiment of a great, a vast heavenly and spiritual order and system. This seeing was absolutely revolutionary. It was a crisis out of which a new world and a new creation was born. True to this fundamental principle, all that vast revelation, which has come down the centuries from and through the Apostle Paul took its rise from that crisis described by him as "It pleased God... to reveal His Son in me" (Gal. 1:16). "I received it... by revelation of Jesus Christ" (vs. 12). All the implications were in the crisis; the full content was a progressive and ever-growing revelation."

"While there was some initial testimony, the Apostles did not formulate in conference an enterprise, a mission, with all the related arrangements and organization. The new Life forced off the old leaves and dressed the new organism with a new vesture from within. The might, energy and urge of the Holy Spirit within produced a Way and an order, un-thought-of, unintended by them, and always to their own surprise. What was happening was really that Christ was taking form within them, individually and corporately, by new birth and growth. The believers and the churches were becoming an expression of Christ."

Now, let's go to Colossians 2;

“For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Col. 2 vs. 1-3)

We saw what Paul was “struggling” about in our last study – in vs. 28.

“. . . admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man perfect (mature) in Christ.”

Paul desired more than anything else to be able to serve the churches he planted in a way that would allow them to be presented to Christ as full-grown believers whose hearts belonged, unreservedly, to the Lord.

So, in the passages we are looking at tonight, Paul gives us some additional information on the “how” of all this.

He uses the phrase, “all the wealth that comes from full assurance of understanding resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself. . . .”

Whether Paul is talking about encouragement or love or any other quality of true Christian experience, everything will ultimately have its realization in terms of fullness, or maturity, *only* in those who “understand the true knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ Himself.”

Most of us probably assume that when a person becomes a Christian, they know Christ. But they don’t know Him in the same way Paul is describing in Colossians or Ephesians.

Which is why Paul prays for these growing Christians that they would, as Paul puts it, “perceive my understanding in the mystery.”

We move toward maturity only by way of a growing understanding of “the mystery of Christ.”

Here are some of the implications of this:

“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. That is a statement that is comprehensive. 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. 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 men, with nations, and with the world throughout all the ages. That one thought centers in His Son, Jesus Christ, 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 as centered in Christ. We could put that in another way, and say that you are growingly able 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. If that is true universally, and if that is true sovereignly and providentially; if that is true not only in the whole history of things in this universe, but true in a special way in human life, it is true, perhaps, in the most essential way in the Word of God as the expression of God’s thought. So, revelation, spiritual illumination, is to see Christ in all the Word of God; not just truths or doctrines, but Christ. . . We are looking, therefore, to receive and adopt all that is of Christ and to reject and pull away from all that is not Christ; for only that which is a perfect expression of Christ will exist in eternity.”

If we are going to know and experience what Paul calls “. . . the wealth that comes from full assurance of understanding. . .” We are going to have to have what Paul also calls “. . . a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself. . . “

Just as Christ is the center of God's universe, He has to become the center of ours also. Not Christianity, not religion, not just doctrines and principles – we need to grow in our understanding of, and obedience to, the Lord Himself.

This is Paul's main emphasis in this section of Colossians. He completely understands how important this is. If we could see Christ as Paul did, all our misconceptions about the church and our man-made attempts to live by His life would disappear in the light of the revelation of who Christ really is.

Which takes us back to the "struggle" Paul mentions in the first verse. Let me give you the literal translation and implication of what he means.

This verse could be translated, ". . . how great a contest of anxiety I am having". The root for this word "contest" is where we get the word "agony". It would be similar to Paul's comment in Gal. 4:19; "My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you."

Again, God's goal is to fill all of creation with the moral and spiritual character of His Son expressed through the unique personalities of an uncounted multitude of saints joined to Him at salvation – so that "Christ may be all and in all" (which is the statement Paul makes in Col. 3:11).

On a practical level, this is why love and truth are the most constant exhortations given to the Body of Christ in the epistles. When the source of these qualities being formed in us is Christ and not religious imitation, then the Father's intention of creation visibly expressing His Son is brought to fullness in the Church.

As John wrote,

"The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

Keeping the Law is man's best, natural, attempt to do God's will; but abiding in Christ brings about the transformation of our inner man into His express image.

The Law was a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ. It demonstrated our complete lack of natural ability to keep it. It was meant to show us that there is absolutely nothing in us that can please God or enable us to be what we were meant to be.

But if we abide in Him and if His words abide in us, the fruit of love and truth will be manifest – the fruit of the indwelling Spirit of Christ.

Ian Thomas once said this:

“To be entirely honest, I know of nothing quite so boring as Christianity without Christ. Countless people have stopped going to a place of worship simply because they are sick of going through the motions of a dead religion. What a pity that there are not more people around to show them that Jesus Christ is alive.”

It's not just the world who wants to find Christ; there are multitudes of Christians who would love to know Him and discover what life in Christ was really meant to be.

I have heard that the Millennial generation is made up of a growing number of young Christians who are becoming very disheartened over the superficiality and hypocrisy of the Church.

They are seeing through the shallowness of all this; and they are hungering for reality.

We all have that same hunger to some degree. We don't want to live in what one teacher called, “the shadowlands of elementary, spiritually insignificant Christian existence”, because we all know that most of what we are experiencing is not what we see in the book of Acts.

I know many of us have had to admit this and come to grips with the fact that our doctrinal knowledge of the “mystery of Christ” that Paul has brought to us in Ephesians and Colossians has not brought us into the deep, spiritual reality of all that our union with Christ is meant to do.

Part of that, of course, is simply a matter of continued spiritual growth, not just academic growth; growth through knowledge *but also* through experience; the development of a history with the Lord.

But here's an illustration or exhortation that adds another dimension to our understanding of this dilemma;

“May I just ask a simple question? Can we say with truth of heart that we are really concerned to be in God's purpose; to be found in that purpose? It is a practical matter – deciding whether we want what He wants. Are we prepared to commit to the Lord in relation to exchanging our life for His? As

the Lord's people, are we ready to just pause and face that? To be part of a race conformed to the image of Christ – taken away from what we were, to become what He is?"

When I first read that, it definitely got my attention because I would definitely say "yes" to all these questions, but if I'm honest, I have to stop and ask the Lord to show me where these things are not true of me and then do what is needed in my life to move toward them.

So, what does that look like? It starts with the acknowledgement that we aren't there yet. That seems obvious, but don't forget that we are living in the Laodicean generation; Christians who are totally blind to their actual spiritual condition.

We might not think that this fits us, and maybe it doesn't, but this is the spiritual atmosphere of the Church in our nation and it can definitely rub off on us if we're not careful.

I'm going to read some verses to you, so see if you can see the common theme.

"This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." So, I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the vessel he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so, the potter formed it into another vessel, shaping it as seemed best to him." (Jeremiah 18:1-4).  
"Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay; you are the potter; we are the works of your hand." (Isaiah 64:8)

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren". (Romans 8:28-29)

I took the time to read these passages because I want to show that throughout the Bible, God is affirming to us that His expectation of us is not to do what only He can do – but to trust Him and give ourselves completely to Him so He can “bring to completion” what He’s begun in us.

Our role in this is to study and pray in way that is characterized by “seeking Him with *all* our heart.” It’s to those people that God will reveal His Son.

You’ll notice in the Jeremiah passage that “the vessel He made . . . was marred in the hand of the Potter.” If we focus on the marred aspect of the vessel, then hopelessness can grab hold of us.

We can say, maybe honestly, that we’ve failed – that we’ve ruined everything, that there is no hope. Our lives are marred and even though we’d love to blame someone else, we really have no one to blame but ourselves.

From there we are tempted to give up.

But Jeremiah also wrote, “He formed it into *another* vessel”. That could be encouraging, but even with this information, we could still believe that since God was not able to fulfill His original plan for us, we’ll have to be content with second-best; something different, but something less than what He wanted me to be in the first place.

But then there’s this other phrase: “. . . as it seemed good to the potter to make it.” That introduces a whole new possibility.

If God is going to do something, He’s going to do it well. It’s the way He is. He’s going to find His own pleasure and His own satisfaction in it, which will be far better and greater and higher than anything we could imagine.

This introduces grace, in spite of our failure and weakness. Grace is the bottom line of establishing God’s viewpoint for life – until we realize the implications of Grace, we will know only discouragement and frustration.

Here are just a few examples:

## **The Earth**

(Gen. 1:2) “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep”, it’s chaos. But the Spirit moved over the face of the waters and brought light out of darkness; He restored what was lost.

So, we see the Potter getting to work on the shapeless, distorted mass of clay.

"He made it again", and when He stood back from the wheel of creation, of making it again, He was able to look upon He’d one and say that "it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). That was God's verdict: 'It is *very* good.'

## **Abraham.**

Abraham and Jacob both failed more than they succeeded. But look at the outcome at the end of their lives.

God unashamedly said, “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” This was “as it seemed good to the Potter”. We could do the same with Elijah, David, Peter, and you and me.

God never hides what these people were in themselves. He lets us see their flaws—the flaws in the clay. He lets us see their weaknesses; He lets us see them break down; He lets us see that if left to themselves they would ruin their lives like everyone else.

But out of that clay, the same clay that we are made of, these vessels emerge. God takes what has failed, what has broken down and 'He reworks it'. "We are *His* workmanship".



## John Mark

We'll take one final example from the New Testament—a young man by the name of John Mark. He lived in Jerusalem, evidently in a godly home. And Barnabas and Paul took him with them on their missionary journey (Acts 13:5b).

But in Acts 15 we see this:

“Sometime later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord.” (Acts 15:36-40)

So, from town to town and city to city John Mark saw the wonderful things that God was doing, but it was hard and costly; and, at some point on the journey, he said, 'I'm not doing this. I'm going home.'

He left Paul and Barnabas went back to Jerusalem.

The clay had given up; he broke down – John Mark failed, period. When he reflected upon this, I wonder what his thoughts were. I'm sure regret and guilt were huge.

Plus, he must have realized that he had been the cause of separation between Barnabas and Paul. It was because of their argument over him that they split up. And I'm sure he had Paul's own words about his failure ringing in his ears.

Here's how the story ends. In 2 Tim. 4:11b, Paul wrote: 'Bring Mark with you; for he is profitable to me' (2 Tim. 4:11b).

There are some pretty incredible things said about John Mark in the end. He is recovered, restored, reworked and re-commissioned.

John Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark. That's how far God's grace recovered him.

Never forget, we're living in the age of Grace.

As one author put it,

“We may be very poor material to work with; but, if there is in us an overmastering sense of the transcendent importance of things eternal, God will make and remake a vessel that is good to the Potter. So that, at long last, He might look upon His work in you and in me, and say, 'Through grace, this worked out well.’”

*“If there is in us an overmastering sense of the transcendent importance of things eternal”; if that's true of us and we are pursuing an understanding of this with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, then our conformity to Christ will continue regardless of our past.*

Some, like Abraham and Moses, are slow learners. Others like Paul and Daniel, move a little more quickly. But either way, because their desire was set on God, they got there.

I did a little research on failure as a way of life. These aren't Biblical examples like the ones I gave earlier, but they make some really good points.

Babe Ruth is famous for setting the home run record; he also holds the record for most strikeouts.

Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* was turned down by more than twenty-five publishers.

When Colonel Sanders was 65 years old, he got a social security check for only \$105 which really ticked him off. Instead of complaining he did

something about it. He thought restaurant owners would love his fried chicken recipe, use it, sales would increase, and he'd get a percentage of it. He drove around the country knocking on doors, sleeping in his car, wearing his white suit. Before he got his first "yes", people said "no" 1009 times.

Walt Disney's first company went bankrupt. He was fired by a news editor because he lacked imagination. He was turned down 302 times before he got financing for creating Disneyland.

Dr. Seuss 1<sup>st</sup> book (Cat in the Hat) was rejected by 27 publishers before someone gave it a shot.

John Grisham's first book (A Time to Kill) took three years to write. The book was rejected 28 times until he got one 'yes' for a 5,000-copy print. He's sold over 250 million copies of his books.

Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team. He turned out to possibly be the greatest basketball player ever. I love this quote...

"I have missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. On 26 occasions I have been entrusted to take the game winning shot, and I missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

Thomas Edison once wrote,

"If I find 10,000 ways something won't work, I haven't failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward."

This matches what we see in Prov. 24:16; "For though a righteous man falls seven times, he will rise again".

If you've tried to obey the Lord in something, but eventually gave up you may be in John Mark's initial spiritual slump, but he didn't stay there; and we can't settle for giving up when so much is at stake.

God uses failure more than anything else in our lives to transform us from self-centered to Christ-centered. With the exception of the Lord Himself, it's a fair generalization to say that in the Bible there is no real success *without* an extended season of failure and a resultant acknowledgment of helplessness.

So, to sum up. Paul's struggle was around whether the Colossians would enter into a life characterized by the "treasures of wisdom and knowledge" – which is focused on having a full understanding of the mystery of Christ.

And as we saw throughout the Bible, for that understanding to become complete, for Christ be at home in our hearts (as Paul puts it in Eph. 3:17); we must decrease to make room for Him – and that willingness to decrease always comes through an understanding of our inability to live the Christian life; which we learn through the school of personal failure followed by renewed surrender and commitment to God's purpose which leads to restoration and growth.

After receiving some questions about a prophecy update by J.D. Farag in which he said that "apostasia" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is referring to the rapture, the reality is that the coming apostasy, or "falling away", is a global spiritual rebellion, not a "spatial removal".

But this reminded me of something I should clarify about the things I send out. When I send messages by other pastors or teachers it's not meant to be a blanket endorsement for everything that person says. J.D. is a good example. I appreciate his research; I gain from the things he digs up, but he's not a theologian.

The reason for the specific messages I send is that they do a great job of covering the subject and I don't plan to try and duplicate it, but I do believe it's essential that we know what they're saying in that message. Some of the 'prophecy update / current event' videos are important, so we can know how to interpret what's happening around us in the light of specific Biblical predictions for our generation, but full-on sermons that I send, that are not just 'updates' but in-depth instruction on vital issues that help us move forward in our spiritual lives, are extremely important to listen to.

So, even though I know some may be in smorgasbord mode regarding which ones you listen to and which ones you don't (based on what seems like it might be interesting or not), I promise you that I'm not sending any messages that are inconsequential; time is short and my constant prayer is that none of us will be unprepared to stand strong in the months ahead prior to Christ's return.

Here's the latest message I would encourage you to listen to – the substance of this teaching is laying out conditions in the world and church leading up to the rapture, as well as detailed info on the rapture itself.

<https://bookministry1.s3.amazonaws.com/assemblies2/9-9-20+wednesday.mp3>