

The Mystery of Christ Revealed

Colossians 1:1-2:5

One of Paul's shortest letters, Colossians packs a tremendous amount of information and glory into four chapters. The letter is far more than a bunch of loosely connected topics, gathered together like a number of articles by the same reporter. Rather, Paul's discussion coheres and progresses like a tree does beginning at the roots and ascending quickly. The branches of family living (3:18-25) only make sense grown upon the roots of the preeminence and reconciliation of Jesus (1:18-20).

Context

Colosse was a small town consisting of Jews, devotees of Greek paganism, adherents of mystery religions, and nominal syncretists as found in any society. It was located on the Lycus River in southeast Asia Minor (modern Turkey) near the larger cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis, and at the time of writing the church had a relatively low profile. Paul himself did not visit it but learned about it through his colleague and native Colossian Epiphras who had preached the gospel there, planted the church, and brought news back to Paul (1:7-8). Paul wrote to them from prison (4:3, 18) as he did the other "Prison Letters" (Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon). The congregation was young, faithful (1:2), growing (1:6) and loved ((1:7, 4:12-13). Then why write them? Because Paul's goal is to present everyone mature in Christ (1:28-29). This is *the* goal of Paul and every solid Bible teacher: new growth rising to maturity.

Paul's Prayer

As soon as he heard about the church in Colosse, Paul prayed they would be filled with the knowledge of God's will, and that such a filling that would result in fruitful action (1:9-10). Faithfulness grows over time, requiring joyful patience (v11). This process happens in the kingdom of Christ because we've been brought to him in the new exodus and redeemed from darkness and sin (vv12-14). He then gives us a beautiful poem in two chiasms about Jesus as creator, sustainer and ruler over all—the image of God—and the *church* as his body or image (vv15-20)!

A – 15 He is the image of the invisible God,
B – the firstborn of every creature.
C – 16 For by him were all things created,
D – that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible,
whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers.
C' – All things were created by him, and for him.
B' – And he is before all things,
A' – and by him all things consist.

A – 18 And he is the head of the body, the church.
B – He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
C – that in all things he might have the preeminence.
D – 19 For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell,
C' – 20 and, having made peace through the blood of his cross,
B' – by him to reconcile all things unto himself,
A' – whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

Paul immediately tells the Colossians they are part of this reconciled church to be presented holy and blameless if they remained steadfast (vv21-23).

The Mystery Revealed

What have the prophets longed to look into? What has been hidden from God's people, predicted but never fulfilled or experienced until it was revealed in Jesus? "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:28). Paul just got finished saying that Jesus is the image of the Father, and now the church is the image of Jesus. We bear God's image as individuals, but here Paul is saying the fullness of God is on view in the church—Jew and gentile included. He wants us to know "the full mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ" (2:2).

What to Do

1. React like Paul does to the growing gospel (1:3, 9)! He doesn't have low standards. We should anticipate a bumper crop, send gifted people out, and give thanks when we see the fruit. We should write letters to our "children."
2. Remember the fullness of Christ. Jesus plus nothing gets you the hope of glory.
3. Be the church. In the Spirit, Paul beholds the Colossians' *order* (2:5). The church is diverse with Jew and gentile, but ordered and connected like the Trinity, and maturing. We're working on this and everyone has a part to play. Every faithful visible church reveals the mystery of the fullness of Christ indwelling her. In every one, we see Jesus Christ.

Jerry Owen – July 31, 2011

Questions for Little Saints, Colossians 1:1-2:5

1. What does Paul call the Colossians in 1:2?
2. What has he heard about them that makes him thankful (1:4-5)?
3. Do you get excited when you hear about good churches and other Christians?
4. What is Jesus a picture or image of (1:15)? Draw an image picture of one of your parents below.
5. Paul says the church is the body of Christ. Do you know everyone in this church? Who will you try to meet today?