

PREFACE

The title of this class is “Just Jesus”—with good reason. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this letter to the Colossians is how Paul presents—sometimes subtly, sometimes with the force of repetition—the supremacy, the sufficiency of Christ Jesus. What a perfect message this is for us, for, just like those in the church at Colossae, we too are surrounded every day by voices and philosophies in opposition to our faith. We *need* the message of this letter. We *need* to be reminded that we need look nowhere else for strength, for help, for sustenance—for truth.

Turn please to Colossians 2:8, to what I believe is the central, core message of this book.

Read Colossians 2:8.

Then watch as Paul sings a hymn of devotion to Christ, exclaiming His many sufficiencies.

Read vs9-15. [note the emphasis on “Him”]

We are still inside the apostle’s interlude in which he speaks of his personal ministry. But even here the emphasis is still on Christ.

Verse 25 of Chapter One begins, “Of this church I was made a minister...” And what was His calling by God? To preach the word of God—that is, the life of Christ, explained to Paul by the indwelling Spirit. This mystery (v26) had been hidden, but now revealed—“manifested”—in Christ to His saints. Through ministers such as Paul (and others) God chose to reveal the “riches of [His] glory” (v27)—that is, “*Christ in you.*”

And what is this message delivered to Paul for him to deliver to the saints? What is he to proclaim? A list of rules and regulations a la the Mosaic Law? A philosophy? A deeper mystery reserved for the elite? Nope. “We proclaim Him...” *A person: Christ.*

Read Colossians 1:28-29.**v28***We proclaim*

“We” = either the editorial plural, or Paul is now (after, in v27, “I, Paul...”) including his fellow ministers. But more important, the “we” (*which in the original is emphatic*) contrasts the message Paul and his fellows are delivering to the message from the Colossian errorists: **They** are telling you lies; **we** are telling you the truth by proclaiming Christ.

proclaim = *katangelo* = from <G2596> (kata) and the base of <G32> (aggelos); to *proclaim, promulgate* :- declare, **preach**, shew, speak of, teach.

First Paul mentions *what* (actually Whom) he is proclaiming, then he breaks down the component parts of his proclamation.

Him

Here, once again (as well as in the last words of this verse) Paul emphasizes the personal nature of this faith. He does not preach a litany of rules and regulations, requirements to *get* us to Christ (“do this, then this, and this, and you will then earn Christ”); he preaches the Person, Jesus.

F. F. Bruce: This Christ, whose life flows in all His people, is the one whom the apostle and his associates proclaim. He is the sum and substance of their message, whether in the saving news which they announce in the world to bring men and women to faith, or in the teaching which they impart to those who have believed.

every man...every man... all wisdom... every man

Note the repetition of the Greek *pas* in v28.

In contrast to the cultic mysteries, or Gnosticism, which emphasized salvation through knowledge, Paul proclaims that the gospel of Christ is open to *all*. Any time a religion includes human effort as the means to enlightenment or salvation, it must by definition be restrictive, for not everyone will achieve these ends.

Last week Linda and I watched the movie *Hawaii* (1966), based on the James A. Michener novel of the same name. It’s the story of a zealous missionary from New England going to the Hawaiian islands to save the “pagan heathen.” But the man (played by Max von Sydow) is so strident, so unbendingly legalistic that he repels more people than his preaching attracts. For him the Bible is a bludgeon with which to browbeat the prospective converts into Christianity, rather than a message of hope in the good news Christ offers. In the face of such abusive preaching, ultimately even his own wife rebels against his dictates.

In the native island culture at that time, the early nineteenth century, it was perfectly acceptable for a brother and sister to be married. The queen is married to her brother, and they love each other deeply. But the missionary insists that before she can be a Christian she must send away her husband/brother, calling their marriage a “mortal sin.” He says to her, “You will not be in a state of grace unless you do this.” Finally, on her deathbed, she sends her husband away. Once she has done this, the missionary baptizes her and assures her that now she will go to heaven.

That, of course, utterly perverts the concept of grace. Grace is a gift, given freely to anyone and everyone, as a result of the work of Christ—not man. All we need do is believe. Changes in a life occur as a *result* of grace, not as a prerequisite for it. This is why Paul proclaims, simply, “Him”: it all happens *after* Him.

unregenerate → **Christ** → salvation, sanctification, holiness, etc.

Read 2 Timothy 1:8-9.

In the first chapter of Colossians Paul emphasizes the *universality* of the gospel. In v6 he writes that

the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing

In v23 he declares that the hope of the gospel
was proclaimed in all creation under heaven

And here in v28 he brings this to a climax with his dramatic repetition of **admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete**

Once the mystery spoken of earlier was revealed, manifested in the person of Jesus, it was available to *all*. God's grace is color blind; it neither respects or refuses ethnicity, nationality, race, levels of intelligence, or personal history. It is available to all.

admonishing, teaching

F. F. Bruce continues,

[Those who have believed] have not learned all there is to know when once they have come to Christ; that is only the beginning. He is indeed the embodiment of divine wisdom, but the exploration of the wisdom that resides in Him is the task of a lifetime, and even so the most enlightened of mortals can only "know in part" (1 Corinthians 13:9). It is necessary, then, not only to preach the gospel but also, when people have believed the gospel, to "instruct everyone and teach everyone in all wisdom."

admonishing^{nasb,nlv}, **warning**^{kjvs,esv} = *noutheteo* = from the same as <G3559> (nouthesia); to put in mind, i.e. (by implication) **to caution or reprove gently** :- admonish, warn.

Scholars seem to be split on what Paul is referring to here. Some hold that the "warning" is intended for the unsaved, to point out their need for Christ. This was Lightfoot's position, that this word may be directed toward non-Christians (to stimulate repentance and the next word, translated "teaching," to Christians (to enhance faith (Moo).

Others—including Douglas Moo—say that this is likely directed toward believers who might be tempted to stray. He points out that because of the goal of this activity—to "present every man complete in Christ"—this is probably being directed toward Christian converts. So the first word, "admonishing," is, in a manner of speaking, the sterner side of the teaching. Paul used the same word in his first letter to the Thessalonians referring to Christian brothers.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14.

And in 1 Corinthians 4:14 he wrote

I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.

The brighter side of this teaching is, well, "teaching"—the "authoritative communication of gospel truth" (Moo).

teaching = *didasko* = a prolonged (causative) form of a primary verb *dao* (to learn); to teach (in the same broad application) :- teach.

with [or in] all wisdom

How was this teaching to take place? *en pase sophia*: in all wisdom. I like what Douglas Moo says about this:

As people need wisdom to know how to live out true knowledge of God, so the preacher needs wisdom to know how to teach and admonish the people... [In Colossae] the believers need great wisdom in negotiating the competing religious teachings they are hearing.

present every man complete in Christ.

The word translated “complete,” or “perfect,” or “mature” in our common versions (*teleion*) can be a bit tricky in English, according to Douglas Moo. Does it mean “perfect” in the way we would interpret that word: absolutely flawless (sinless)? Or does it mean “mature” in the sense that we are coming along, we are maturing (but not yet perfect)? Happily we don’t have the time to burrow down into that, but let it suffice that most commentators agree that Paul is thinking about the return of Christ—the *parousia*.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20.

If this moment is what Paul had in mind when writing to the Colossians, then his use of *teleion* in v28 would refer to when we do, indeed, stand before our Lord perfect in every way.

Whatever the level of maturity or completeness is intended, it is a touching picture of the faithful evangelist presenting [*paristemi—another reason to associate the moment with Christ’s return*] his converts to his Lord.

We can’t know, of course, how—or even if—it will play out this way. But it is a pleasant thought, isn’t it. Perhaps that will be part of our heavenly reward: the privilege of presenting to our Savior and Lord those who have come to Him through something we have said or done in His name.

Or perhaps Paul is just speaking here as a pastor, referring to how he will one day have to answer to God for the souls left in his charge. (Hebrews 13:17)

As the first chapter closes, Paul speaks of the means by which he accomplishes all this teaching.

Read v29.

The apostle works *hard* at his calling:

labor = *kopiaō* (kop-ee-ah'-o) = from a derivative of <G2873> (kopos); **to feel fatigue**; by implication **to work hard** :- (bestow) labour, toil, **be wearied**.

striving = *agonizomai* = from <G73> (agon); **to struggle**, literally (**to compete for a prize**), figuratively (to contend with an adversary), or genitive (to endeavor to accomplish something) :- fight, **labor fervently**, strive; **intense exertion**.

If we isolate the first part of this verse, we are left picturing the apostle slogging it out manfully, exerting almost superhuman effort to fulfill his calling. And we might accurately imagine Paul, at the end of each day, collapsing exhausted into his bed. [Dwight L. Moody: "Lord, I'm tired! Amen."] But then Paul pulls a fast one on us. This may be fleshly effort—but the sustaining force behind it is *not* fleshly.

This labor, this striving, is not by Paul's power, but by *Christ's* power.
...according to His power, which mightily works within me.

The NASB is not the best translation of this verse. The KJVs and the ESV do a better job of capturing the repetition employed for emphasis.

NKJV: To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

ESV: for which purpose also I labor, striving according to his working which is at work powerfully in me.

working (noun) = *energeia* (en-erg'-i-ah) = from <G1756> (energes); efficiency ("energy") :- operation, strong, **(effectual) working**.

works (verb) = *energeo* = from <G1756> (energes); **to be active, efficient** :- do, (be) effectual (fervent), be mighty in, shew forth self, work (effectually in).

mightily^{nasb, kjvs}, **powerfully**^{niv, esv} = *dynamis* = from <G1410> (dunamai); **force** (literal or figurative); **specialty miraculous power** (usually by implication a miracle itself) :- ability, abundance, meaning, might (-ily, -y, -y deed), (worker of) miracle (-s), power, strength, violence, might (wonderful) work.

When we are "in Christ" it is *His* supernatural, divine power at work in our ministry. And why it is appropriate that He receive all the praise and credit for the results.

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.
Philippians 4:13