

OVERVIEW & OUTLINE

Colossians

The evangel according to Paul

“To make known the secret of the evangel” (6:20)

BOB EVELY

2011.

“... in accord with the administration of God, which is granted to me for you, to complete the word of God – the secret which has been concealed from the eons and from the generations, yet now was made manifest to His saints, to whom God wills to make known what are the glorious riches of this secret among the nations, which is: Christ among you, the expectation of glory ...”

Colossians 1:25-27

*All Scriptures taken from the Concordant Literal New Testament
and the Concordant Version of the Old Testament unless otherwise noted.
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About the Author

Paul begins by identifying himself as the writer of this letter (1:1) Let us recall the commission Paul received on the road to Damascus: *He is a choice instrument of Mine, to bear My name before both the nations and kings, besides the sons of Israel.* (Acts 9:15-16) And we know from Acts that Paul did go first to the synagogues to proclaim Christ to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. Peter, John, James and other New Testament writers had a commission to Israel only. Paul alone was commissioned to go to the Gentiles.

We cannot assume Paul's message to the Gentiles was the same as the message proclaimed by the others unto Israel. Paul stressed that the gospel he proclaimed was not received from man, *but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.* (Galatians 1:11-12) If he preached the same gospel, why would he not have studied under the Twelve who had heard and observed Christ Himself during His earthly ministry? And why would Paul refer to his proclamation as "my evangel" instead of "the evangel?" (Romans 2:16; 16:25-26). Paul notes that he had been entrusted with the evangel of the Uncircumcision, and Peter had been trusted with the evangel of the Circumcision. (Galatians 2:7). He did not say that his was the evangel *to* the Uncircumcision; but *of* the Uncircumcision. It was a different message, and this can be clearly seen if we examine the details. Paul is the only one to have mentioned the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, or the expectation of the body of Christ in the celestials in Ephesians 2:6. Israels' expectation was always upon the earth, not in the celestials or heavens.

Paul was abandoned by nearly all at the end of his ministry (see 2 Timothy 1:15; 4:16; Acts 21:20). Note in the Acts passage that when Paul returned to Jerusalem he was opposed not by unbelieving Jews, but by believing Jews who were zealous for the law – a clear signal that Paul's message was different than that of the Twelve, and as a result Paul was opposed by Jewish *believers*.

Paul, in his writings, refers to a mystery that had been previously concealed, but which he was now revealing as God had instructed him. ... *His body, which is the ecclesia of which I became a dispenser, in accord with the administration of God, which is granted to me for you, **to complete the word of God** ... the **secret** which has been **concealed** from the eons and from the generations, yet now was **made manifest** to His saints ...* (Colossians 1:24-16) ... *by revelation the secret is made known to me ... the secret of the Christ, which, in other generations, is not made known to the sons of humanity ...* (Ephesians 3:3-5)

Clearly Paul was commissioned to address a group not previously addressed by the Twelve (the Gentiles), with a different message that had been revealed to him not by man but by Christ Himself.

Introduction: The address on the envelope (1:1)

From: *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus ...
and brother Timothy ...*

To: *The saints (hagios = holy ones; literally “set-apart-ones”)
and believing brethren in Christ in Colosse.*

Always praying (1:3)

Look at the nature of Paul’s prayer ... not self-centered, but centered on Christ Jesus and love for others.

- *Hearing of your faith in Christ Jesus*
- *And the love which you have for all the saints*

The expectation (1:5)

What prompts the faith and love of the believers? The expectation that they enjoy ... an expectation that:

- Is reserved in the heavens
- Was heard in the word of truth of the evangel
- Is bearing fruit and growing
- Caused them to realize the grace of God
- Was learned from Epaphros ... a faithful dispenser of Christ

Paul’s desire – that the believers fully realize God’s will (1:9)

... requesting that you may be filled full with the realization of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding ...

This full realization would the lead to ... (1:10)

... you to walk worthily of the Lord for all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing in the realization of God ...

- Good works and walking worthily
- A continued growth in the realization of God
- Power for endurance and patience with joy
- Giving thanks to the Father

Consider what God has done (1:12)

- Makes you competent for a part in the allotment of the saints
- Rescues us out of the jurisdiction of darkness
- Transports us into the kingdom of the Son of His love

Consider the Son, and what He has done (1:14)

- In Him we are having the deliverance, the pardon of sins
- He is the Image of the invisible God
- The Firstborn of every creature
- In Him is all created

This passage does not say that Christ Jesus (the Son) ***is*** God; but that He is the ***Image*** of God. He is the ***Firstborn of every creature***. Could it be that the revered “Trinity” doctrine is incorrect? Could it be that Christ was the very first of God’s creation, high above all else that was subsequently created, and even the agent of that subsequent creation?

But consider this. The Scriptures do not tell us to proclaim a correct doctrine as to the personhood of God the Father as compared with the personhood of Christ Jesus the Son. Certainly we are to seek an understanding of what the Scriptures reveal, and we are to praise and glorify God the Father and Christ Jesus the Son. But as to the message we are to convey as Christ’s Ambassadors, and as the complement of Christ, we are instructed to proclaim the ***effects*** of what God the Father and Christ Jesus the Son have accomplished. *Be conciliated to God!* That is to be the focus of our proclamation. Yet much effort is expended, and much dissention is created, by arguments between those with varying understandings of the ***personhood*** of God the Father and Christ Jesus the Son. Let us all seek a growing understanding of what the Scriptures convey, but let us show patience and tolerance toward those having a different understanding than our own relative to the personhood issue (i.e. Trinitarians, Unitarians, Modalists).

In Him is ALL created (1:14)

- That in the heavens and that on the earth
- The visible and the invisible
- All is created through Him and for Him
- All has its cohesion in Him

As it pertains to believers, Christ is ... (1:18)

- The Head of the body, the ecclesia (literally “called-out-ones”)
- Sovereign
- Firstborn from among the dead
- In Him the entire complement delights to dwell

Through Him ALL is reconciled (1:20)

Remember the “all” in this context, from 1:14, refers to all of creation. Believers (the body, or ecclesia) are noted in a special way, but “all” refers to all of creation. The reconciliation in 1:20 is a parallel to the creation in 1:14. All are created ... and through Christ all are to be reconciled.

- Through Him to reconcile all to Him ... whether those on the earth or those in the heavens
- Making peace through the blood of His cross

You (believers) were once estranged (1:21)

And you, being once estranged and enemies in comprehension, by wicked acts, yet now He reconciles by His body of flesh ...

The believers (to whom Paul directs this letter) were estranged

- Enemies in comprehension (i.e. they had an incorrect understanding)
- Wicked acts

Yet now He reconciles

- To present as holy and flawless
- Unimpeachable in His sight (not perfect, but flawless *in His sight*)
- Since surely you are persisting in the faith (not *if* you persist, but those presented as flawless will surely persist)
- Grounded, settled, and not being removed from the expectation

Ultimately, when we look at 1:20, we see that all creation will be reconciled. At present the ecclesia (body of Christ) is reconciled. Remember the differentiation as seen in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 between conciliation (one-sided) and reconciliation (two-sided). The 2 Corinthians passage tells us that in Christ, God was conciliating the world to Himself. But the world is not yet conciliated to God. The world is estranged from God. Our proclamation, as Christ's ambassadors, is: "*Be conciliated to God!*" Those heeding that call, and who become conciliated to God, would then be reconciled. And, as we see in Colossians 1:20, through Christ will **all** be reconciled.

His body ... the ecclesia (1:23)

Paul became the dispenser of the evangel, through which the expectation is proclaimed. And it is for *His body, which is the ecclesia of which I became a dispenser, in accord with the administration of God, which is granted to me for you ...*

The word "ecclesia" is translated "church" in most Bible versions (except in those cases where the notion of "church" does not fit), causing us to lose valuable insights provided by God. "Ecclesia" means called-out-ones ... those whom God has called out of the larger group of humanity for some specific purpose. But just as there are different presidential administrations enforcing different policies in our political realm, so also there are different administrations in God's workings in the world. Paul references here the specific administration of God that was granted to him, in which he proclaims that the body of Christ is the specific ecclesia, or group of called-out-ones, for which he became a dispenser of good news.

The Body of Christ was not introduced by any other person in the Scriptures, either before or after Paul. It was Paul's specific commission. Peter and others within the Twelve addressed the believers among Israel ... that was the called-out-group (ecclesia) they addressed. Paul had a **different** commission, in a **different** administration, and the body of Christ was the called-out-group that he addressed.

To complete the word of God (1:25)

This is a major point, not to be overlooked. To Paul it was granted *to complete the word of God – the secret which has been concealed from the eons and from the generations, yet now was made manifest to His saints, to whom God wills to make known what are the glorious riches of this secret among the nations ...*

In the past God spoke through certain individuals he had chosen ... Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. He spoke through the prophets of the Old Testament. He spoke most directly through His Son, Jesus Christ. And after the crucifixion and resurrection God spoke through prophets in the early ecclesia. Now comes Paul, who informs us that he has come to **complete** the word of God. After Paul there would no longer be the need for prophecy or prophets, for the word of God would now be complete. The Scriptures preserved by the apostles (including Paul) say it all! There would be nothing to add to what had already been revealed. Did Paul not tell us that prophecies, at some point, would be discarded and languages (tongues) would cease (1 Corinthians 13:8)?

Note also that as Paul completes the word of God, he reveals a secret. This is proof that Paul's message was different, and not the same as that of the Twelve ... else it would not be a secret that had been concealed in the past.

Paul's secret (1:27)

There are other mentions in Paul's writings of a secret, and to gain a complete understanding of the secret(s) revealed by Paul we should study all passages where this is noted. As for what we are told concerning the secret in this current passage:

- Christ among you, the expectation of glory – Whom we are announcing ... admonishing ... teaching
- That we should be presenting every man **mature** in Christ Jesus

There is a need for growth and maturity in the body of Christ (unlike the immaturity and fleshliness that Paul confronted in 1 Corinthians). Turning once again to 1 Corinthians 13:8, where Paul tells us of a time when prophecies will be discarded and languages will cease, we note that this would happen when maturity comes (1 Corinthians 13:10). And now in Colossians, as Paul announces his charge to **complete** the word of God, we see his additional charge to present every man **mature** in Christ Jesus. As maturity comes, and as the word of God is completed, there is no longer a need for the inferior devices (prophecy, languages) to guide believers.

Paul's wants the believers to FULLY understand the secret (2:1)

... all the riches of the assurance of understanding, unto a realization of the secret of the God and Father ...

Beware of philosophy and human tradition (2:8)

Beware that no one shall be despoiling you through philosophy and empty seduction, in accord with human tradition, in accord with the elements of the world, and not in accord with Christ ...

Speaking to the believers, Paul notes: *And you are complete in Him.* Nothing is to be added to God's grace. No law, rules or regulations are needed. Paul introduces maturity and completion ... the believer is complete in Christ.

You were circumcised ... baptized (2:11)

Paul speaks of circumcision and baptism in a figurative way in this passage. Just as the law was a requirement that served as a shadow of what was to come, so also the physical acts of circumcision and baptism had served the same purpose ... and here we see that the believer is circumcised, entombed, baptized, and roused in a figurative sense.

Food, drink, festivals, sabbaths (2:16)

Let no one, then, be judging you in food or in drink or in the particulars of a festival, or of a new moon, or of sabbaths, which are a shadow of those things which are impending – yet the body is the Christ's.

In short ... all of these outward and visible “do's and don'ts” served their purpose but are not to be enforced upon the body of Christ.

If, then, you died together with Christ from the elements of the world, why, as living in the world, are you subject to decrees: “You should not be touching, nor yet tasting, nor yet coming into contact,” ... in accord with the directions and teachings of men? (v. 20)

Religious circles today are filled with requirements and rituals. Churchgoers are convinced that they must celebrate “the sabbath” by attending worship services, abstaining from work, etc. Many are convinced they must be water baptized. Is it not clear from what Paul is saying here that these things do not matter? Christ has surpassed these things, yet religious leaders continue to impose elements of the law upon believers.

Beware of human tradition. (See once again verse 8.)

Seek that which is above (3:1)

If, then, you were roused together with Christ, be seeking that which is above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Be disposed to that which is above, not to that on the earth, for you died ...

Since we figuratively died with Christ and were roused with Him, there is no longer a need or requirement for us to be disposed to earthly things ... like the law, feasts and festivals, sabbaths, dietary restrictions. And we are also to set aside other earth-bound characteristics:

Deaden, then, your members that are on the earth: prostitution, uncleanness, passion, evil desire and greed, which is idolatry, because of which the indignation of God is coming on the sons of stubbornness – among whom you also once walked, when you lived in these things. (Verse 5)

Those within the world will one day face the indignation of God (Romans 2:9) ... on the day of indignation (Romans 2:5) ... because of these behaviors. This is not to say that believers will also face God's indignation if they persist in these behaviors. Salvation is not based upon works, but God's grace. God has called the body of Christ for special work that will ultimately contribute toward reconciling the entire world to God ... and we are spared from this coming indignation (Romans 5:9). What Paul is saying in this passage is: "Since these behaviors will result in God's indignation upon those of the world, and since we have been spared from the day of indignation by God's grace, let us not walk in these same behaviors."

Specific behaviors to “put away” and to “put on” (3:8)

Be putting away:

- Anger
- Fury
- Malice
- Calumny
- Obscenity
- Lying

Why is this important if we have been saved by grace, and not works? ... *to accord with the Image of the One Who creates it, wherein there is no Greek and Jew, Circumcision and Uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but all and in all is Christ. (v. 11)*

Alternatively, put on, then, *as God's chosen ones:*

- Pitiful compassions
- Kindness
- Humility
- Meekness
- Patience, bearing with one another and dealing graciously among yourselves ... according as the Lord also deals graciously with you.

And above all these put on:

- Love, which is the tie of maturity.
- Let the peace of Christ be arbitrating in your hearts ...
- Become thankful.
- Let the word of Christ be making its home in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing yourselves ...
- Everything you do, in word or act, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God ...

Note that ***it is the word of Christ that teaches and admonishes us, not a priest, pastor or minister.*** In times past, before maturity, these fleshly designates were needed to teach and admonish. But Paul's words in Colossians are of a higher nature, and it is the word of Christ that now teaches and admonishes without the need for a mediator.

A key difference in Paul's writings

Let us take note of a key difference in Paul's writings in verse 11.

... there is no Greek and Jew, Circumcision and Uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but all and in all is Christ.

ALWAYS before this time Israel had been primary. The Gentile could only be blessed through Israel. During Jesus' earthly ministry He came only to the sheep of Israel. Even in Paul's early ministry he would go first to the synagogues, and only to the Gentile when Israel rejected his message.

But now, clearly, there is a difference. Paul, and only Paul, revealed the body of Christ ... *God's chosen ones* (v. 12) ... within which there is no longer a superiority to Israel. This is clearly different from the teachings of the entire Old Testament, the four Gospel accounts, and the ministry and epistles of the Twelve. Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles, and his message is clearly different from all that preceded him.

Subjection, Love (3:18)

- Wives, be subject to your husbands
- Husbands, love your own wives
- Children, obey your parents
- Fathers, do not vex your children
- Slaves, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh
- All, whatever you do, work from the soul, as to the Lord and not to men

Ultimately all will be subjected to God. In this temporal world in which we live, God has designed an organized system of subjection in order that His purposes can be accomplished. But wherever there is subjection, there is also love and compassion. And while, as to the flesh, there is a system of subjection; all (subjector and subjectee alike) serve a single master ... the Lord. And subjectors in this world must keep in mind: *He who is injuring shall be requited for that which he injures, and there is no partiality.* (v 25)

The bottom line ... *Masters, tender that which is just and equitable to your slaves, being aware that you also have a Master in the heavens.* (4:1)
Regardless of our station in this world, we are all servants of the Master!

Persevere in prayer (4:2)

- *With thanksgiving*
- *That God should be opening for us a door of the word, to speak the secret of Christ.*

It is always interesting to examine the subject matter of Paul's prayers. Here is a most unselfish prayer ... centered solely on the glorification of God.

Walk in wisdom toward those outside (4:5)

The Body of Christ was chosen to proclaim the message of reconciliation to the world. How we live before the world is important, if we are to be effective ambassadors.

- *Your word being always with grace*
- *Perceiving how you must answer each one*

Paul's fellow servants (4:7)

Paul mentions a number of his fellow servants, some of whom are acting as Paul's messengers as he is imprisoned.

- Tychicus
- Onesimus
- Aristarchus (fellow captive)
- Mark (cousin of Barnabas)
- Jesus (Justice)

That you may stand mature (4:12)

Epaphras is noted as *always struggling for you in prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God*. Again we see the desire of God that those within the body of Christ grow in maturity and completeness in an understanding of God's will.

Greetings (4:14)

Paul expresses greetings from Luke and Demas, and he then asks his readers to Greet *the brethren in Laodicea, and Nympha, and the ecclesia at her house*.

It is always interesting to note church organization as it is expressed in Paul's writings. Far from the denominational and even independent church structures we see today, is the simplicity and informal nature of the church *at her house*. Mention is also made of *the Laodicean ecclesia* ... simply the believers reside collectively in Laodicea; not some formal group that meets together every Sunday in a huge structure that is owned by the church organization. Food for thought!

EPILOGUE.

Colossians stresses maturity and completion. Following are some key points made by Paul in this letter.

- ✓ *Paul prays that the believers come to fully realize God's will (1:9)*
 - ✓ *Walk worthily (1:10)*
 - ✓ *Continued growth in the realization of God (1:10)*
 - ✓ *Paul granted the administration to complete the word of God (1:25)*
 - ✓ *Paul tasked with presenting every man mature in Christ Jesus (1:28)*
 - ✓ *That the believers fully realize and understand the secret (2:1-2)*
 - ✓ *Beware of philosophy and human tradition (2:8)*
 - ✓ *Seek that which is above ... set aside undesirable earthly behaviors (3:1)*
 - ✓ *That you may stand mature (4:12)*
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