

## THE AMAZING WEALTH FOR BELIEVERS - “CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY”

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*The unique truth of the message which Paul proclaimed as “good news” was that God Himself would presently exist and live out his character, purpose, and care through those who received Christ Jesus as Lord. The church at Colossae had the privilege and responsibility to expose the “glory of God” in their corporate and private lives because of the miracle of the ongoing incarnation of Christ. This is still the “hope of Glory.”*

When Moses had his conversation with Yahweh, as recorded in Exodus 33, the leader of God’s people said, “What distinguishes God’s people from all other people on the face of the earth **is the presence of God Himself being with them.**” What he said so long ago is still affirmed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by Christians. But is that startling reality even possible? - **a people with whom the presence of God dwells?** Is this theological idea and ideal only a myth or is it a practical possibility?

The message of the gospel - as presented in the New Testament - is that God came - **in the flesh** - to dwell among men! When Matthew begins his account of the Gospel, the first Old Testament passage that he sites identifies the promised savior as “**Emanuel**” and then he adds, “which means, God with us.” John wrote in the prologue to his account of the Gospel:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)<sup>1</sup>

After the resurrection of Jesus the startling message of His followers - indeed, the very heart of the Gospel - was that Jesus was God in the flesh. “Incarnation” is the theological term. However, the “Gospel” message is more than an historical

1 *The Holy Bible: New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Jn 1:14). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

affirmation that mankind has been visited by God in the flesh. At center of that which was preached was the truth that individuals **could have a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus**, who is the Christ! John Stott reminds us that this union with Christ is a unique teaching among the world's religions. He writes:

No other religion offers its adherents a personal union with its founder. The Buddhist does not claim to know Buddha, nor the Confucianist Confucius, nor the Muslim Mohammed, nor the Marxist Karl Marx. But the Christian does claim to know Jesus Christ! More than a teacher who is to be studied and revered, Jesus Christ is our living Savior and Lord, whom we know in the closeness of a vital and loving relationship (Stott, p. 38).

This living relationship is central to the teaching of the New Testament. In the epistles of Paul, expressions like "in Christ", or "in the Lord", or "in Him" occur more than 160 times. The fact is - the New Testament identification of what we might call a Christian is **a person who is "in Christ."** What makes a person a new creature, according to Paul, is that he is "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17). In the epistle which we call Ephesians, the writer identifies every blessing which the "saint" presently possesses as being because he is "in Christ".

Jesus in the "Upper room discourse" likens this relationship to a vine and its branches. In union with Him there is life and fruit. Without that vital relationship there is no life or lasting results (John 15). Like the incarnational relationship where by Jesus is "in" the Father, our Lord promises His followers that they will be "**in Him**" (John 14:20). Paul uses two images to describe this union. The church is the living body of Christ and every believer is a "member" (like an arm is a member of a human body). Again, like a husband and a wife "become one flesh", so we become one with Christ.

When the Epistle was written to the church in Colosse - a church which was struggling with an incomplete understanding of the incarnate Christ -, the writer provided a document which contains some of the strongest affirmations concerning the incarnation. Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God and as such provides redemption and forgiveness (but note, this is ours only as we are *in Him*). Our author affirms that Christ is the **εἰκὼν** (*eikon*) of the invisible God, the creator of all, and the one who holds everything together. He is the one for which everything belongs. Twice the writer states that "in Him all the fullness of God dwells" (1:19 and 2:9). It is through Him and in Him that everything will be reconciled to God. The author identifies *this* Christ as the "mystery of God, which had been kept hidden for ages and generations, but now disclosed to the saints." He is the one in whom is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. This brief document provides the church with many of the great truths from which we have developed our Christology.

But Colossians also identifies an additional, **crucial truth** for our soteriology and our ecclesiology. God in Christ has come and with His coming He has provided rescue from the rule of darkness and translated believers into the Kingdom of Christ. Gentiles and well as Jews are included in the rescue and in the transportation into the Kingdom. (This is the mystery about which Paul writes in Ephesians.) Any and all who have faith in Christ Jesus and participate in the Gospel can be included “in Christ.” Those who were enemies (of God) can be reconciled and presented holy in God’s sight (Col. 1:21-23). The reason believers are “holy in His sight” is because those who “were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal. 3:27). With this new relationship and identity come riches that only the wonder and power of God could provide. Paul states that he has chosen by God to make known among the Gentiles **the glorious riches** contained in this mystery of Christ and what He provides in relationship with His followers.

This great wealth is also identified as a mystery. The brothers at Colossae are not only **in** Christ, but Paul discloses that Christ is **in them!** This glorious reality makes all the difference for their individual and cooperate identities. Paul affirms that this wealth, miraculously provided by the power of God, becomes the possibility of their presently expressing the glory of God and sharing in the ultimate future glory of God. Maybe our writer was remembering the words of Jesus when the Lord said, “...you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and **I am in you** (John 14:20). It is helping the Colossians to understand this “mystery” that will enable him to “present everyone *teleios* (perfect) in Christ” (Col. 1:28). This reality of Christ dwelling in the life of believers became a concern of Paul’s prayer for the whole family of God which he identifies in Ephesians:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.** (Eph. 3:16-17)

Paul reminds the Colossian Christians and us when and how this process began. When each person participated in the Gospel (the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus) at their baptism, they **trusted** in the **power** of God. There they were forgiven, the written code that stood against them was taken away. There they were raised with Christ! (2:12) They are now in Christ and Christ is in them! Because of this new “super-natural” relationship, they can and should focus their thoughts and hearts on that about which Christ is concerned. They can and must put to death that which expresses the old life. They have a new self which is being renewed in the very image of their creator, Jesus. His character and concerns can now be reflected in their individual relationships and in their cooperate life.

Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience are to become the

visible expression of life. Christ lives in his people! Wives can allow Christ to respond to their husbands through them. Husbands really are able to love their wives like Jesus loves the Church because He lives in them. Slaves can do their work in the spirit and power of Jesus. This truth which Paul has disclosed has provided understanding that they work not for their masters, but for the one who dwells in them! All those who have this relationship with Jesus are challenged to do what is done and say what is said “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Those who have experienced the gospel have Him within them who enables them to be different – looking and acting like Jesus Himself. This becomes the individual believer’s witness as well as the witness of the community of believers to their world that Jesus is alive and presently active. ***Christ living in them is witness to the on-going incarnation.***

As Jesus grew in wisdom and favor with God and man (Luke 2:52) so can the embodiment of Christ. In conclusion Paul provides very practical admonitions for those in whom the living Christ lives. If they are to look like Jesus, they will do as follows:

- Let the peace of Christ rule in the hearts of the community.
- Let the word of Christ dwell in the life of the community and the individuals. There must be a renewed focus on the life and teaching of Jesus not for knowledge but for living!
- Teach and encourage one another. Active conversation about the things of Christ and his mission must be the activity of believers.
- Worship with praise and thanksgiving.