

OVERFLOWING WITH THANKSGIVING

Colossians 2:1-10

One of the things we all look forward to at Thanksgiving is the filling aspect of it. Pie filling, turkey filling, filling our cups with hot cider or hot chocolate, and filling our stomachs with all sorts of good stuff like that! I think we can all relate with some of these memes: “I hope the turkey isn’t the only thing to get stuffed this Thanksgiving!” – “Every Thanksgiving I am thankful for my stretchy pants” – “This Thanksgiving I’m going to stop eating as soon as I get full – said no one ever.” Some of us are going to leave the Thanksgiving table just completely satisfied, feeling like we’re just brimming over we’ve eaten so much! In fact, you’ll probably eat so much that there’s no room for more. That’s what happens when you’re satisfied... the thought of more is almost repulsive! Kind of like when you finish your meal at a restaurant and the waitress asks, “Did you leave room for dessert?” The usual reply is “Oh, no, no... check please.”

And you know, that’s something that Paul tells the Colossians they should be known for – being full. That they should be so fully satisfied with Christ, that they don’t room for more than Christ! In the book of Colossians, Paul is writing to believers to encourage them in that if they have Christ, they don’t need any more! He is combatting the false ideologies from false teachers who were diminishing the Person and work of Christ, teaching them that they needed more than Christ, and thus, making them feel empty and thankless for Him. We are looking at the ultimate reason why Christians can be brimming over with Thanksgiving.

Please turn in your Bibles with me to Colossians 2:1-10. This is the center or core of the book.

“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. I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument. For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude [*some translations say ‘thanksgiving’*]. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the Head over all rule and authority.”

Alright, so let’s start out with a little background on this book: Paul is writing mainly to a church in Colossae that is having some problems with false teachers diminishing Christ.. And just to give you an idea of where **Colossae** is at, it is located about 100 miles east of Ephesus near Laodicea in modern-day Turkey. This was an insignificant, small town and it was a church that Paul had not yet visited (2:1) so he was not personally acquainted with these believers. **Epaphrus**, a fellow servant with Paul, was the one who played a major role in the shepherding of this church (1:7) and reported to Paul the condition that it was in. So Paul is basically writing to his spiritual grandchildren whom he’s never met, disciples of a disciple. And what should amaze us is the heart of Paul for these people whom he has never met.

I. **PAUL'S HEART FOR THE COLOSSIANS. (VV. 1-3, 5)**

We see his heart right there in verse 1, "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." The word for struggle there is the word "agon", something we recognize in our English word, **agony**. Paul is agonizing over these believers as he did with all believers and all churches whether he met them or not. He said in 2 Cor. 11:28-29, "Apart from such external things [persecutions & hardship], there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" It hurts to care¹ and Paul did.

For this church in particular there is an internal conflict going on in Paul because of false teachers seducing Christians from their simple faith-relationship with Jesus Christ. He is agonizing that they would go beyond the vast treasure of Christ to worthless things that we'll look at shortly. But notice His heart. Even though Paul is absent in body, he said "I am with you in spirit" (v. 5) praying fervently for you to be knit together in love, to be stable in Christ and for Him to be the core of your soul and center of your world and nothing else.

 **Paul wants these believers to treasure Jesus Christ above all else.**

To have a full knowledge of Christ and to know their fullness in Him. There is another great principle here for us in that:

 **You don't have to know someone personally to be praying for them.**

Years ago at a particular prayer meeting on a mission trip, a young man asked why we were praying for countries and people groups we've never seen before? He didn't seem particularly enthused about that. But as we see here, the apostle Paul had no problem praying for those whom he had never met but had only heard about. And I hope you're praying for other churches and peoples around the world as well. Prayer is spiritual warfare for Paul. And we need more like him in this:

 **The church needs people who struggle on behalf of it.**

People who will give their hearts and minds and lives, in hardships and in prayer, to see the church strengthened and stable in its faith in Jesus Christ. People who will contend for the simplicity of faith in Jesus and be repulsed when any church is led astray from that, even a small and insignificant church like Colossae. Pray for the **good discipline** of staying fixed on Christ alone because He is the "true knowledge of God's mystery... in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge". Paul is setting up a contrast here between **the mystery of God in Christ and the mystical "knowledge" of false teachers.**

II. **COMBATING THE GNOSTIC'S FALSE HIGHER KNOWLEDGE (VV. 4, 8)**

It's a little difficult to determine *exactly* what these false teachers were teaching because it was so syncretistic (a conglomeration of Jewish, pagan and Christian features), but we do know a few things and the big one is that **they were teaching Christ were diminishing Christ's Person and Work, dethroning Him of His rightful place.** They weren't asking the believers to outright deny Christ, but to make Him part of their system, to lessen who He is.

From the evidence within the letter that we could say these guys were **gnostics**, which comes from the Greek word **gnosis**, meaning **knowledge**. An agnostic would say that God is unknowable, the "a" negating the word gnosis. But these guys aren't saying that you can't know God. They were persuading these believers that they needed a higher knowledge *beyond* Christ. They'd found a "higher spiritual plane" than Christ, maybe making impressive claims like, "You have Christ and that's great, but there's more they haven't told you!" And when someone takes that bait, **they**

immediately move from their sense of contentment and fullness and satisfaction in Christ, to seeking more than Christ. They've lost their full assurance and wealth in Christ (v. 3).

How exactly? Well, for one, we know that they were **taking away from Christ's sufficient work on the cross by teaching the believers to live by the works of the Law – Jewish ritualism and traditionalism.** Paul brings up circumcision, part of the Law, in verse 11, "...in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." He is saying the circumcision that matter is the circumcision of the heart, the old nature, that comes by faith in Christ through the Spirit. You also see the different Jewish rituals carried on in verse 16, "...no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day."

Beyond this, these guys were being enveloped in **ascetic practices** of self-denial, the practice of denying certain things like food or drink or anything delightful in this world by treating their body harshly to try and enter into this "higher spiritual plane." In verse 20 of chapter 2 he says, "If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of this world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit to such decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) – in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom and self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence." Whenever I read that, I immediately think of monks. These guys who hide from the world and have strict diets and strict lives. They treat their body harshly maybe by sleeping on a thin pad on the concrete because they're trying to find a greater connection in the spiritual realm. And it looks really spiritual.

But this practice has behind it a false assumption that earthly & physical things are evil and heavenly or spiritual things are good. And it appears that it's that false, but popular idea, that led them to think it was inconceivable for the supreme God that created the universe to have contact the created universe so he did so through intermediaries like **angels** and they encouraged worship of angels and heavenly visions as part of initiation in some circles. So he says, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind."

In fact, in ancient Greece, that phrase "**elements of the world**" really meant, "the elemental spirits of the universe, the angels that influenced the heavenly bodies."ⁱⁱ It was a form of religious astrology that believed angels and heavenly bodies were really influential, a lot like the superstitious horoscopes. So it was a mess of a system that's hard to explain but point being, **they wanted them to make Christ part of their system and to do so meant denying His Deity and His physical body.**

This is why Paul is making so much of Christ in this book. Their idea of Christ is **not the same Christ.** Paul says that Jesus Christ is not just some angel or just another mediator, **He is the one and only mediator between God and man because He is God** (1 Tim. 2:5)! Against this gnostic mess of false ideas, he says, "**See to it** that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of this world, rather than according to Christ. For **in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.**" In Him

all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form. Paul is saying that Jesus Christ is 100% God and 100% man. Full Deity in bodily form. He is the God-Man. He created the universe. He is over all and He is all you need.



Jesus is fully God – even Creator of the universe.

He was not a lesser god, a demi-god or partial god but God with skin on. When the 2nd member of the Trinity became man, He was not a reduced God but the exact imprint of the invisible God. Look at 1:15: “He is **the image of the invisible God**, the firstborn of all creation [*the preeminent First Cause*]. For **by Him all things were created**, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of the cross.” This is why Jesus is the treasure of all knowledge. He is God and it’s only through Him and His cross you’re made right with Him. You don’t need anything else.

Paul, knowing this, commands them to focus on Christ and grow in their knowledge of Him and His work. To develop their Christology.

III. THE MAIN MANDATE: GROW IN YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST. (VV. 6-7, 9-10)

Verses 6-7: “Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.” One of the words here to key in on in verse 6 is the word *received* where Paul says, “Therefore as you have *received* Christ Jesus the Lord.” The verb he uses for the word *receive* is specifically employed to denote the receiving of something which was delivered by tradition.ⁱⁱⁱ In light of the Jewish traditions they’re still practicing, of which were a shadow of Christ, but Paul is saying is that Jesus Christ is your “tradition”. He’s the substance of your shadows (2:17). And to go back to the “traditions of men” because to leave the gospel of Christ is to go back to something elementary - to leave your doctorate and go back to pre-school. Jesus fulfills the Law so why go back to it to live by? Live by faith in Christ.



Jesus Christ is our “tradition”

Even Christian traditions such as communion and baptism emphasize Christ’s sufficiency.

You’ll also notice as they have received Christ, they are to *walk in Him*. And that word *walk* is a **present active imperative**. It means **we are commanded as believers in Christ to continually walk in Him**. And that’s something that probably would have made these guys’ ears perk up because being acquainted with the OT, they probably knew what it was like for priests to walk *before* the Lord, or for men like Abraham or Enoch to walk *with* the Lord, but now they’re being told to walk *in* the Lord. And that’s something that would certainly be new and mysterious to these who loved mysteries! Try and explain what it means to walk in Christ! It’s not easy.



We are to walk IN Jesus Christ.

When you think of a walk, you think of something that is **intuitive and organic**^{iv}. It’s not something that requires a doctorate degree or is strange. It’s **natural**. It’s **relational**. To go on a walk with someone is one thing, but this is actually a walk *in Him* so **the oneness of it all is amplified** even more. **We are in Him and He is in us**. *But what does this walk look like?* I think it’s walking with a focus on the glorious realities of Jesus Christ and all that means for us. **It means taking in every**

situation and every **thought** through the filter of the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Maybe I can offer a few suggestions as to what this looks like:

One popular question like at Colossae is, *Are we under the Law/Mosaic Covenant?* Verse 14 says why He canceled out the certificate of debt, consisting of decrees against us. **He has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross**, initiating a New Covenant. Leave it on the cross.

Let's say you sin (and you do). *Do you have complete forgiveness?* Verse 13 says **He has forgiven us all our transgressions.**

Are you doubting salvation? 1:12 says **He has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints, rescued us from the domain of darkness and already transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption.** He has reconciled you in His fleshly body through death to present you holy and blameless and beyond reproach.

Do you wonder if you can have any consistent victory over sin? Verse 11 says your sinful nature is no longer the dominant one but by the Spirit, Verse 13, says **you've been born again, made alive together with Him (in union with Him).** You have a new nature you can live by.

What do you do when you're tempted to sin? Recall your identity with Christ (2:12; 3:1-3). You've died to sin and have been **raised to new life in Him. Keep seeking the things above.**

Do you ever sorrow over this earthly body's breaking down? Hold on to the hope that just as Jesus was raised, so there is a resurrection coming, a redemption of our bodies. 3:4 says when Christ is revealed, **you'll also be revealed with Him in glory.**

Do you not have an earthly father? Did your parents abandon you? Remember **your Father in heaven has adopted you** in Christ.

Do you struggle to forgive someone? 3:13 says to **forgive others as the Lord has forgiven you in Christ.**

Are you undergoing affliction for your faith? **Christ was afflicted.** You are becoming like Him.

This is practical. *Do you lose sleep at night over the power struggle for the White House?* Christ has ascended and is seated at the right hand of the Father and given all authority.

Do you need strength and power to do the work of ministry? Paul said in 1:29 he strives according to the power of God that was mightily at work in Him. Not by his own but by Christ's strength.

Does your public school teach evolution? Filter that through Colossians 1:15. Jesus is the Creator of all things and evolution is elemental philosophy.

Do you wonder if God is with you? Hold fast Jesus' promise that, "I am with you always even to the end of the age." (Mt. 28:20)

Do you have a heavy load of care? And who doesn't this year? Jesus said come to Me and I'll give you rest. Cast your cares on Him.

We could go on and on about how we walk in Christ. We're just learning to **take every situation and analyze it in light of who He is and what He has done. He is the answer to every question. The whole Christian life flows out of the revelation of Jesus Christ. So when it comes to Jesus Christ, it's okay to be a "simpleton."**

So Paul says **be rooted in Christ**: that's an **agricultural term**. If we are plants, we must be planted in the rich soil of Christ or we die. Poor soil, rocks, and sand causes us to die. This is a one time thing according to the tense of the word. You put your faith in Christ once -rooted in Him.

Then you are to **be built up in Christ**: Having been planted, we grow, finding nourishment in His grace. We become established. Not like tumbleweeds that break off and blow away but like oaks.

But notice **even though we are in Christ, Christ is in us!** Verse 10 says, "and in Him you have been made complete." That word rendered *complete* in the NASB can mean to come to an end, to have a full degree, to make total, to finish. Some translations say "**you have been filled in Him**" (ESV) or "**in Christ you have been brought to fullness**" (NIV). What a picture of the finished state of believers in Christ. If we are a bottle and Christ is a never-ending ocean, we are totally filled with Him and there is no more room for anything else! You can't fit anymore in us than Christ. We are finished. Made total. Come to an end of our need for anything other than Jesus. A very literal translations says, "And you are in Hi, having been completely filled full with the present result that you are in a state of fullness."



We are totally and fully complete in Him.

Based on 1:25-27 we could call that the hope of glory. Paul was a ministry **of the mystery**, "**that is Christ in you**, the hope of glory." He is in us through the Spirit of God. And my prayer is not that you would really know this fullness of Christ in you. When you know Christ is the fullness and God and you've been made full in Him, you don't want anything else anyone has to offer you. **You are satisfied in Christ, you are full and brimming over with thanks-giving to God in Him.**



Thanks-giving is the distinctive trait of someone who is full of Christ.

That is the distinctive trait of someone who is rooted and built up in Christ. Like a river at flood-stage, they are brimming over with thanksgiving because they have Christ! Like David, their cup runneth over!^v Go to any third world country where Christians are persecuted and I'll bet you'll find the most thankful people on the planet. They don't have much but they have Jesus and they're known for the most expressive worship.

One thing I want to say is that I don't want you to confuse thanksgiving with happiness. One of the worst religions out there is the religion that insists on you being happy at all times - that for the Christians there's just never a dark moment. That's not what thanksgiving is. There's a lot in this world we are not happy about, but it doesn't mean we can't be thankful. If we're focused on all the treasure that is Christ, meditating on that, calling it to mind, thanksgiving will overflow and drown out some of those inward desires to moan and groan and complain about everything going on in this world.

But the reason we don't see more Christians today full of thanksgiving is because too often we're like the Colossians, having pawned off the treasure of Christ off for trinkets and knickknacks out of a vending machine. We buy into hollow deceptions and empty, man-made philosophies like:

1. **Externalism:** The idea life is bound up in what we have – our possessions. It's the idea like one man told Mr. Hurley, "That the one who has the most toys in the end, wins." But **Full Christians don't complaint about what they don't have. They're thankful for what they do and use it for Christ's glory.**
2. **Individualism:** This ide tries to finds fulfillent in personal recreation, business and accomplishments. The "me" mindset. But **Full Christians know it's not about them.** But about Christ and being a part of a community of believers.
3. **Organic Evolution:** This is a popular hollow philosophy that leaves people feeling hollow – like and accident or worthless or purposeless. It ignores the spiritual realm. **Full Christians know Jesus is their Creator.** And Sustainer. And Redeemer.
4. **Relativism/Pluralism:** Basically, these philosophies would lead us to think that everyone can their own truth or we can start blending and syncretizing it all like the gnostics. But **Full Christians know that Jesus is the only Way, only Truth and only Life.**
5. **Moralism:** This philosophy leads us to ignore Christ's finished work on the cross. Tries to make you think that if you just become a better you, that's all you need. But **Full Christians know they can't ever be good enough and that's why God stepped into this world, becoming a man to pay for man's sins and in Him, the Full Christian places all his trust.**

Only in Christ can fill you long term. So here's what I want you to do: when this world offers you more than Christ or something other than Christ, you tell them, *"I'm sorry but I'm already full. I already have Christ in me, the hope of glory, and anything else will make me sick! I have no room for dessert! But there are leftovers though if you would like some!"*

ⁱ Kent Hughes.

ⁱⁱ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: NT* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2007), 676.

ⁱⁱⁱ F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 93.

^{iv} Sandy Wilson, series: Colossians, February 11, 2007.

^v Ibid.