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## Hold Fast to Christ!

*(Col 2:2b-3 ESV) to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

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*“If We Have Christ, We Don’t  
Need Anything Else”*

**Jan 6, 2013**

**Sermon Text:** Colossians 1:9-14

**Scripture Reading:** Hebrews 1

### **Introduction-**

Last time we just touched on this matter of knowing the Lord. This is the thing Paul prayed for unceasingly

in regard to the Colossians, and no doubt for himself and other believers too. I will tell you right up front that I do not fully understand what it means to be “filled with the knowledge of His will,” but I do know that it is vital and that we can pray for these things even if we don’t comprehend exactly what they are with full clarity. Listen to the prayer again:

(Col 1:9-14 ESV) 9 ¶ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. 11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his

beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Somehow, this knowledge of God's will that results in us pleasing Him and bearing fruit and increasing in the knowledge of God relates to what He does in us when He regenerates our hearts:

(Jer 31:33-34 ESV) 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: **I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.** And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' **for they shall all know me,** from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

And then, as Paul's prayer indicates, this knowledge of the Lord grows - *increasing in the knowledge of God* (vs 10). So it is something that we should all be praying for, and praying for one another. Let's break the elements of Paul's prayer down:

1. Filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding;

-so as-

2. To walk in a manner worthy of the Lord;  
-fully pleasing to him,  
-bearing fruit in every good work,  
-and increasing in the knowledge of God.

3. Strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might,

-for-

-all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father.

Notice then that this knowledge of the Lord is all wrapped up in *knowing His will*, and that this "knowing" is called a "spiritual wisdom and understanding." What does "spiritual" mean?

I think that it means, something that is given us by God through His Spirit; something that is from heaven as opposed to being earthly.

We see it in 1 Cor 1-2:

(1Co 1:4-6 ESV) 4 ¶ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 **that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge--** 6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—

(1Co 1:20-25 ESV) 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

(1Co 2:11-16 ESV) in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. **12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. 13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. 14 ¶** The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. 16 "For who

has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

The wisdom of God, you see, becomes ours in Christ and increases in us. This wisdom and knowledge is in contrast to the thinking patterns of this world. Worldly wisdom does not know God. God's wisdom seems weak and foolish by the world's standards of understanding.

Notice also that the Holy Spirit is directly involved in giving us this understanding of God and of His will. This is called "the mind of Christ." We increasingly know and think as Christ does.

And the result? We increasingly live in a manner that pleases the Lord, that is worthy of and consistent with who we now are in Christ.

This new knowledge of God and His will for us is in such contrast with the mindset of the sinful world, that *we are going to require God's glorious and mighty power if we are to persevere and endure with thankfulness and joy as we live for Christ in this world.*

Notice carefully the next few verses then:

(Col 1:11-14 ESV) 11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

See it? Here is what HAS happened:

- We have been made heirs (of all the promises to Abraham)
- We have been delivered from the domain of darkness
- We are now members of Christ's kingdom of Light
- We have redemption
- We have forgiveness

Maybe think of it as having been a citizen of Mordor and now the King has come and paid your way out of there, forgiving you for all of your rebellion against Him and making you one of His sons and heirs. All completely undeserved of course. What you were in that darkness is all changed – radically.

Notice that it was a DOMAIN of darkness. In our lost condition, we were not only ignorant, but that darkness was ACTIVELY keeping us in blindness to the light of Christ. That

word “domain” means “authority.” Exousia. Satan had his dominion over us. Christ delivered us from that rule.

And we should also notice this word TRANSFERRED. We were *transferred* from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of Christ – of light. A kingdom of life and truth and seeing and knowing. “Transferred” means –

*as causing someone to change sides mentally or spiritually bring to a different view;*

Listen here to Matthew Henry comment on this great transfer from darkness to light -

1. "He hath delivered us from the power of darkness, v. 13. He has rescued us from the state of heathenish darkness and wickedness. He hath saved us from the dominion of sin, which is darkness (1 John i. 6), from the dominion of Satan, who is the prince of darkness (Eph. vi. 12), and from the damnation of hell, which is utter darkness," Matt. xxv. 30.

They are called out of darkness, 1 Pet. ii. 9. 2.

"He hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son, brought us into the gospel-state, and made us members of the church of Christ,

which is a state of light and purity." You were once darkness, but now are you light in the Lord, Eph. v. 8.

Who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light, 1 Pet. ii. 9.

Those were made willing subjects of Christ who were the slaves of Satan. The conversion of a sinner is the translation of a soul into the kingdom of Christ out of the kingdom of the devil. The power of sin is shaken off, and the power of Christ submitted to. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes them free from the law of sin and death; and it is the kingdom of his dear Son, or the Son of his peculiar love, his beloved Son (Matt. iii. 17), and eminently the beloved, Eph. i. 6. 3.

"He hath not only done this, but hath made us meet to partake of the inheritance of the saints in light, v. 12.

He hath prepared us for the eternal happiness of heaven, as the Israelites divided the promised land by lot; and has given us the earnest and assurance of it." This he mentions first because it is the first indication of the future blessedness, that by the grace of God we find ourselves in some measure prepared for it. God gives grace and glory, and we are here told what they both are.

(1.) What that glory is. It is the inheritance of the saints in light. It is an inheritance, and belongs to them as children, which is the best security and the sweetest tenure: If children, then heirs, Rom. viii. 17.

Now, because of this great and mighty work of God in us through Christ, *our redemption, our freedom, our forgiveness, and the means for us to come into a FULL knowledge of God IS ALREADY OURS!*

- Who HAS qualified us
- He HAS delivered us
- We HAVE redemption, the forgiveness of sin.

And the reason Paul is emphasizing all of this as a present possession by every Christian is that the heresy that was threatening the church at Colossae said that by doing this and not doing that the Colossians would come to some higher plane, some level that was not theirs yet. But that is all nonsense. Christ has given it all to them! And to us.

You see the same thing in Adventism that we used as an illustration last time. Ellen G. White taught a system that said if you become an Adventist then you will be part of the "true remnant of God." And to become a part, you had to do this and that, abstain from this or that, and so on. It

is always the same old scheme. Christian Science. All of it. So verses 13-14 are THE message that Adventists, for example, so desperately need to understand.

### **He Who Has Seen Christ Has Seen the Father**

It makes sense then that Paul now turns our attention to Christ. What follows is one of the plainest and most powerful affirmations of Scripture as to the deity of Christ. No need to get all caught up with angels or some other kind of supposed intermediary beings (like praying to the saints, or to Mary), because Christ is greater than all of them. HE is ours! We are His! Listen to it –

(Col 1:15-20 ESV) 15 ¶ He is the

- image of the invisible God,
- the firstborn of all creation.

16 For

- by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things were created through him and for him.

17 And

- he is before all things,
- and in him all things hold together.

18 And

- he is the head of the body, the church.
- He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

19 For

- in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,
- 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Whew! This section is packed with just about every doctrine in the Bible! You've got it all here – the whole gospel. It may well be that these verses constitute an early Christian confession. You see the very same thing in other NT passages:

(Joh 1:1-4 ESV) ESV John 1:1 ¶ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not

any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

(Heb 1:1-4 ESV) ESV Hebrews 1:1 ¶ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Alright then, *how do we know God? How do we know His will – what is pleasing to Him?* How do we see the invisible God?

### ***By Looking at and Listening to Christ***

Christ is the Word of God made flesh. Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God. Christ perfectly represents the Father, so that He could say that if we have seen Him, we have seen the Father. The Spirit of God is involved in enabling us to hear and understand and desire Christ. But Christ is how we come to see and know God.

I think that this is why Paul turns from his prayer for the Colossians and points them to Christ. If they are to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, if they are to live in a worthy manner and be fully pleasing to God, then they need to look at Christ. To listen to Him. To believe Him.

You will see this as a main argument then in Colossians – the pre-eminence of Christ. Keeping our eyes on Christ. Here are some verses we will come to that have that very purpose:

(Col 2:2-4 ESV) to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.

(Col 2:6-10 ESV) 6 ¶ Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. 8 ¶ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

See it?

(Col 2:16-19 ESV) 16 ¶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

So to see God, we look at Christ. We need look no further! To have all that God has to give, we only need have Christ. We need nothing else. We need do nothing else. God has spoken to us in His Son. Hear Him! Here is His Word. Read it. Listen to His words. Look at His actions. In doing so, you will be looking at and listening to God Himself. Pray that the Lord would, by His Spirit, lead us into deeper and clearer understanding of Christ.

For example: As we read God's Word, we learn that the omnipotent, mighty God chooses to work through weakness. Weak things. He chooses to exalt the humble and lowly and to

bring the high and mighty down. He says that in His kingdom, the first shall be last and the last shall be first. That he who loses his life will find it, and he who keeps his life will lose it.

This is GOD! This is how He operates. This is true truth. And this is an example of the spiritual truth and wisdom that Paul prays for the Colossians to get hold of. For US to get hold of. We must not and cannot add anything to Christ!

(Col 2:16 ESV) 16 ¶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

It would do all of us much good if we would seriously spend some time thinking about ways that we are pressured to do this very thing today. Not only from Adventism or other such non-Christian systems, but from within ourselves and in our own churches.

“God will be more pleased with me if I...” – you complete the sentence. We please God by knowing and doing His will, not by listening to things men make up and try to enslave us with.

- Do not handle
- Do not taste
- Do not touch

*It's really hard to find a body of believers that you can be free in, to be who God made you to be, where the fellowship is honest. But I keep hoping.* [Comment from a blog reader this past week]

Alright then, let's return to verse 15 and take a closer look at the things Paul tells us about Christ.

### **He is the Image of the Invisible God**

(Col 1:15 ESV) 15 ¶ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

“Image” is like our English word, “icon.” Here is a lexicon definition –

Eikwn (1) as an artistic representation, such as on a coin or statue image, likeness (MT 22.20); (2) as an embodiment or living manifestation of God form, appearance (CO 1.15); (3) **as a visible manifestation of an invisible and heavenly reality form, substance** (HE 10.1)

Now, when Paul says that Christ is the image of God, we know that he means more than an image in the sense of a statue being an icon of Caesar, for instance. The statue is not Caesar. But Christ IS God.

This is evident by the other things Paul is going to say about Christ – things that are true only of God, such as being the Creator of all created things.

Christ then is the image of God in the sense of being God and taking on human form. Becoming truly a man. Here is the London Confession of Faith (Contemporary, Chapter 8) -

8.2 The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, is truly and eternally God. He is the brightness of the Father's glory, of the same substance<sup>1</sup> and equal with him who made the world, who upholds and governs all things he has made.<sup>2</sup>

When the fullness of time was come,<sup>3</sup> he took upon himself human nature, with all its essential properties<sup>4</sup> and common infirmities,<sup>5</sup> yet without sin.<sup>6</sup> He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The Holy Spirit came down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowed her, so that he was born to a woman from the tribe of Judah, a descendant of Abraham and David, in accordance with the Scriptures.<sup>7</sup>

So two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, mixing, or confusion. This person is therefore truly God<sup>8</sup> and truly human,<sup>9</sup> yet one Christ, the only

Mediator between God and the human race.<sup>10</sup>

You have the same thing, once again, in Hebrews 1 –

Heb 1:3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...

He is the Eternal Word (John 1) become flesh.

So once again we see Paul telling us that if you want to see God, whom cannot be seen, *look at Christ who we can see*. Many people fail to do so. They read Christ's words and read about His actions and work, then turn right around and tell us what they think God is like – entirely different!

Do you want to know what God thinks about you? About sinners? About oppressive religion? Look at Christ. What does the cross mean? Why did Christ come into this world? What are the attributes of God? Look at Christ.

### Christ is the Firstborn of all Creation

(Col 1:15 BNT) πρωτοτοκος πσης κσεως

The firstborn – prototokos. As always, we date not go with the “theology of the first glance” which might say that

Christ was the first created being. I think we can reject that notion by just reading the next two verses:

(Col 1:16-17 ESV) 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

If Christ is the Creator of all created things, including heavenly spirit beings, and if He is before all things and He is the One who holds all things together, then necessarily He Himself cannot be a creature. This is of course where the Jehovah's Witnesses go wrong.

So, if prototokos does not mean “the first creature created,” then what does it mean? We let Scripture answer that question for us-

(Col 1:18 ESV) 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, **the firstborn from the dead**, that in everything he might be preeminent.

(Rev 1:5 ESV) 5 ¶ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, **the firstborn of the dead**, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us

and has freed us from our sins by his blood

Other NT verses in which prototokos appears are:

Lk. 2:7

Rom. 8:29

Heb. 1:6

Heb. 11:28

Heb. 12:23

Based on an examination of these verses and other sources such as the LXX, the Greek lexicon gives these meanings:

pertaining to existing superior to all else of the same or related class - 'superior to, above all.'

pertaining to existing prior to something else - 'existing first, existing before.' 'existing before all creation' or 'existing before anything was created' Col 1.15. It is possible to understand prototokos in Col 1.15 as 'superior in status'

Of course this all has an Old Testament background. It was the firstborn who was the heir. And we see it in the Psalms:

(Psa 89:20-29 ESV) 20 I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him, 21 so that my hand shall be established with him; my arm

also shall strengthen him. 22 The enemy shall not outwit him; the wicked shall not humble him. 23 I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him. 24 My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him, and in my name shall his horn be exalted. 25 I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers. 26 He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.' 27 And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. 28 My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him. 29 I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens.

So when Paul tells us that Christ is the firstborn of all creation, he is saying that Christ is exalted to the highest position possible. He is superior to every other being. That God the Father has given Him all things. He is the Head of the church. He is exalted above all the other "firstborn from the dead." As firstborn of ALL creation, there is nothing and no one higher than Christ.

And now the case gains crescendo:

***Christ is the Creator. Of ALL things.***

Furthermore, He is the SUSTAINER of the universe:

(Col 1:16-17 ESV) 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

What is energy? What is light? What is magnetism? Why doesn't the earth fly off into space? Gravity? But what is gravity? Why do atoms not just break apart? Trace all of these questions back far enough, and you will have to say "I don't know." Scripture answers however. It is Christ. There is a Power holding all things together. There is something or someone who does not need anything outside itself to exist. And that something is Christ.

And then there is a New Creation. You are part of it if you are a Christian. In fact, every single Christian is a firstborn and thus an heir! But how did this New Creation come into being? How is it held together? The answer once again is Christ, the Head of the body, the church. Of all those raised from the dead, He is firstborn from the dead, and pre-eminent.

We will plan to turn to these things next time:

(Col 1:18-23 ESV) 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. 21 ¶ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

In the meanwhile, remember the main point in all of this. If you have Christ, you have everything. If anyone ever comes along and tells you that you need to do or have or...whatever, in order to have God's full approval, tell them to just keep walking. You have it all. Therefore, nothing else can be offered.