

Christ Reformation Church

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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, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

“The Power of God – In US!”

Feb 3, 2013

Sermon Text: Colossians 1:15 – 23

Scripture Reading: Judges 6:11-39

Introduction-

¶ 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. (Colossians 1:9-14 ESV)

We have looked now at verses 1-23 of this first chapter of Colossians and we have learned:

- That Paul is in prison at Rome as he writes this epistle. He has never personally seen the Colossians.
- Epaphras has brought him a report, both good and troubling, about events in Colossae.

- The new church at Colossae is being threatened by some kind of Jewish/pagan syncretism that promises some higher spirituality through various forms of asceticism and legalism. Christ, it appears, is said to not be enough.
- This false system somehow exalts angels as additional mediators between heaven and man (NOTE: application today would be New Age teachings AND Roman Catholicism's hierarchy of "saints" and Mary to whom prayers are to be offered)
- But Christ's work for us is complete, with nothing else required.
- Christ Himself is the Creator of all things and thus is pre-eminent above all. He is the Head of the Church, with no place for any additional "heads." In Christ we have everything.
- We have been reconciled to God in Christ. Peace has been established.
- Therefore we must NEVER permit anyone to draw us off of our solid Rock, the Lord Jesus Christ. We must be on constant guard against delusions and deceptive philosophies, against people passing judgment upon us and telling us that we are somehow disqualified in God's

sight unless we submit to their systems.

Beware then in particular of "systems" promoted by some individual that promise to make you the true godly wife or husband or parent or..... whatever. The Lord has given pastors and teachers and so on to His church for the building up of the saints (Eph 4:11ff), but –

(1Jo 4:1 ESV) ESV 1 John 4:1 ¶
Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

And they always disguise themselves as sheep.

Let me give you an example of this kind of thing, one that really can be of our own making. Consider the Puritans for instance. We have many Puritan writings in our library. There are theological seminaries named after the Puritans. I have a new Systematic Theology of the Puritans – what the Puritans believed about various doctrines and practical matters.

They are in the whole very good things. But...

People have taken the Puritans, immersed themselves in their writings and practices and set out to live their

lives as virtual Puritans. They model their family after the Puritans. Churches embrace Puritan practices and ideas. Pretty soon, it is Puritan doctrine that is being taught, and the Puritans were just human beings. They were not infallible and must not be treated as such.

I read recently that some reformed pastors are starting to wear clerical collars. I imagine that they have been so immersed in historic writings of Christians in a past era that they have decided to emulate them in this regard. Perhaps a harmless practice. But perhaps not.

The point the Apostle Paul makes for us here in Colossians is – *we must not get our focus off of Christ*. And when people become so enamored with human beings and human practice and tradition, inevitably Christ is put to the background. We begin to put our faith and trust in all of these things we are doing, somehow believing that now Christ is more pleased with us than with other average believers.

Here is C.H. Spurgeon issuing the same warning to us in his *Sword and the Trowel* publication way back in the 1800's –

IN the frequent quarrels between the priests and monks of the Church of Rome, the two parties of rogues were

silly enough to expose each other's villainies. On the edifices belonging to monasteries, priests were caricatured in the stonework; and on the churches built by priests, the monks and friars were held up to ridicule. A great deal of real truth was thus brought out by their mutual recriminations. The ancient carving above is a specimen of a common caricature representing the clergy as foxes with geese in their hoods; a very admirable picture whether monks or priests were intended. Popery, with its secret confessional and priestly interference at dying beds, is essentially a fox. Puseyism, pretending to be Protestant, and gradually bringing in all the foolery of Rome, is a deep fox indeed. Yet there are geese silly enough to be deceived by priests in this nineteenth century; and so long as the supply of such geese is kept up, the foxes will never cease to prowl.

Reader, do you believe that men like yourself have priestly power? Do you think that they can regenerate infants by sprinkling them, and turn bread and wine into the very body and blood of Jesus Christ? Do you think that a bishop can bestow the Holy Ghost, and that a parish clergyman can forgive sins? If so, your head can be seen in the picture peeping out from the cowl of the fox. You are the victim of crafty deceivers. Your soul will be their prey in life and in death. They cajole you

with soft words, fine vestments, loud pretensions, and cunning smiles, but they will conduct you down to the chambers of death, and lead you to the gates of hell. Silly goose, may grace make thee wise!

Jesus Christ is the true Priest who can forgive all your sins; go to him at once, without the intervention of these pretenders. Make confession to him! Seek absolution from him! The Holy Ghost alone can cause you to be born again, and the grace of God alone can bring you to glory. Avoid Puseyite and Romish foxes, for they seek to make a gain of you, and lead you not to Jesus, but to their Church and all its mummeries. **Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and not in these deceivers.**

That is the message of Colossians! Listen to this wise advice someone told me this past week regarding how to very practically be on guard. This advice was given in regard to looking for a new church, visiting for the first time. But it can be applied every day of our lives in all situations:

“First of all, pray before you go into the church. I usually pray for forgiveness for any sin I may have committed (willing or unwilling) and then affirm a couple of verses about God’s forgiveness like 1 Jn 1:7-9 or Isaiah 1:18. Then I think in my mind

something like, ‘Ok, Lord, there’s nothing between You and me now. I know my sins are gone forever. I am clean. As white as snow. Cleansed of ALL unrighteousness by the blood of Christ who is in me as witness.’ From that position of strength, I open the car door and head to the church building.

When you get there, know two things 1) you are without blame by Scriptural promise, and 2) some accusers will arise. It is inevitable. But God will only reveal them in His time. You may actually be blessed with one or two visits where you are not judged at all.

When the judges arise, in order to deal with them, know that accusers themselves name their own judgment – not yours.

Matthew 7:2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

And that is how we stand against philosophies and plausible arguments and ‘do not handle, do not taste, do not touch’ systems and people that are always trying to lead us away from the fullness and sufficiency of Christ.

The Power of Christ

I want to spend the rest of our time now looking in more detail at this matter of the POWER of God that is

available and vital to the Christian. Several of you have mentioned it after we looked at verses 9-12 and that is encouraging to me that you heard it and realized the centrality of this power in every Christian's life.

(Col 1:9-12 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.

Following Christ requires *strength*. It is no easy road. Paul mentions it –

(Col 1:29-1 ESV) 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. ESV Colossians 2:1 ¶ For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face,

Now notice carefully here that Paul speaks of struggling with all HIS energy that HE powerfully works

within him. There is clearly something here that we all need.

Consider what it takes to follow and serve Christ:

- Ability to suffer loss
- Ability to endure persecution
- Ability to DO things Christ has called us to do
- Ability to FIGHT temptation
- Ability to be courageous in the face of fearful circumstances

Ability. Power. Strength. Where does it come from? It must come from the Lord, and when we try to generate it ourselves, we are going to fail.

Have you ever thought that you fall soooo short of what Christ wants you to be and do? That, for example, to do what He calls you to do requires you to BE someone you just don't think you can be? And believe me, there are plenty of people ready to tell us how insufficient we are! Many people whom we have known the best and longest – such as family – want to hold us to being the person we have always been –

- You could never do that
- You just aren't _____ enough for such situations
- I don't see you in that role
- You are just too _____

Christians can even do this to one another. But consider – we should not become discouraged in this regard. If the dynamic in every Christian is CHRIST LIVING IN US, then change is the order of the day. BECOMING is the order of the day. You may have failed many times in a particular area, but Christ desires to work and live in you so that you WILL and WORK *according to His good pleasure.*

Perhaps you have failed and you think that all you will ever do is mess things up. I will never be the mother, or the father, or the husband or wife that Christ wants me to be. I am too messed up. What is the remedy? I suggest to you that it is this POWER Paul speaks of here, because-

The Power of Christ is a TRANSFORMING power. Study it in Scripture. Look at the examples there. People who were totally unable suddenly became bold and courageous and even knew the right words to speak in very hard circumstances. Do not miss this. The power of Christ is a TRANSFORMING power. It is the same power that raised Christ from the dead and that raises us up as brand new creations.

This means that, if you are like me and I suspect that you are, *as you grow in Christ you see even more clearly how*

short you fall. You look around and see other Christians who seem to be so much further down the road than you. Or you look back on your life and you see that you messed this or that up and you feel like just giving up.

Well, this is where this power comes in. Listen to Paul –

Galatians 2:19-20 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. (20) I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

This, I believe, is directly connected to the strength and power of Colossians 1. Christ in us. Christ living in us. What if, you see, CHRIST were YOU and YOU were Christ? Understand? I don't mean understand how. I just mean think of Christ in you living, moving, directing, thinking, speaking – in and through you. This is not just a promise of something available only to Paul. It is for us. He is in us. Look how Christ in Paul radically transformed that one-time Pharisee! Chief of sinners.

And remember, what happens when this power, strength, Christ-in-us living and speaking and doing is that it is CHRIST living, speaking, and

doing. Do you think that then you would be adequate? I think so!!

Let's just look at some more of these power and strength Scriptures-

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. (8) Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. (9) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, **for my power is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

You can see the principle, right? God's POWER is indeed in us and available to us. I think it is the Spirit of God in us who is also Christ in us. And it must be something like God needing to get us out of the way, putting us into weakness, often through some trying experience, so that Christ is unleashed!

It is, you see, this cursed self-trust that we have that is the obstacle. In some mysterious way, we quench the Spirit of Christ in us when we *will*. Listen again –

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. (9) Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

And again –

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Acts 4:33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

Acts 6:8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.

EVERY time in Scripture that God calls upon one of His people to BE or to DO for Him you see this power:

Psalms 20:7-9 Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. (8) They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright. (9) O LORD, save the king! May he answer us when we call.

Psalms 33:16-22 The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. (17) The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue. (18) Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, (19) that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine. (20) Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. (21) For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. (22) Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

And here is still another from the New Testament:

Philippians 2:12-13 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, (13) for it is God who

works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

God is working in us. Christ is living in us. What is He doing? He is working to will and to work in such a mysterious way that WE will and work according to His will and pleasure. How does this work? I don't know, but it does.

And what are we to do? We are to pray for this working, this power, this strength. That is what Paul does, and this is what we must do. I would not at all doubt that this is the thing Jesus prayed for when He went away to pray. And notice that not even Christ began His ministry without first having the Spirit come upon Him.

In connection with this divine strengthening, notice how quite consistently the Scripture emphasizes God first *weakening* us – literally and in our own eyes – before He strengthens us. Here are some examples:

Judges 7:1-22 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. (2) The LORD said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand,

lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' (3) Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.'" Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained. (4) And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' shall not go." (5) So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink." (6) And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men, but all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water. (7) And the LORD said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home." (8) So the people took provisions in their hands, and their trumpets. And he sent all the rest of Israel every man to his tent, but retained the 300 men. And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley. (9) That same night the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it

into your hand. (10) But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant. (11) And you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outposts of the armed men who were in the camp. (12) And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance. (13) When Gideon came, behold, a man was telling a dream to his comrade. And he said, "Behold, I dreamed a dream, and behold, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell and turned it upside down, so that the tent lay flat." (14) And his comrade answered, "This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp." (15) As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped. And he returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Arise, for the LORD has given the host of Midian into your hand." (16) And he divided the 300 men into three companies and put trumpets into the hands of all of them and empty jars, with torches inside the jars. (17) And he said to them, "Look at me, and do likewise. When I come to the outskirts

of the camp, do as I do. (18) When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon.'" (19) So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just set the watch. And they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. (20) Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they cried out, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" (21) Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled. (22) When they blew the 300 trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army. And the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.

It is always this way. This is the Lord
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John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

So when we are self-trusting, we are somewhat like a grapevine branch that

is unhooked from the main vine. No life, no power, thus no fruitfulness. But make that attachment and that branch WILL bear fruit.

And so, with all of this in mind, let's return to Colossians 1 and hear Paul's prayer once more –

(Col 1:9-12 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.

Now, the implications of this for YOUR life are HUGE. This thing is real. It means that if we will pray this prayer, praying for this transforming power, Christ will increasingly live in us – in our thinking, in our emotions, in our will, with our hands and our speech. The old me will fade and the Christ will increasingly become visible.

Christian you are NOT doomed to the status quo. Christ works in you to fashion you into the New Creation that you are. You do not have to remain stagnant in your old ways. And WE must not assume that other Christians are who they are always and forever. We should be praying for everyone here, this prayer Paul prayed for the Colossians.

Think of the ramifications:

- That Christian who “always.....” will one day change in that regard
- Things that work to divide us as a body of believers will fade as we trust Christ to change us and renew our minds. See it here –

(Phi 3:15-16 ESV) 15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

See it? God will reveal it to the less mature. And this is why patience is so important. In His time, the Lord CHANGES His people! So we must be patient.

(Psa 25:8-9 ESV) 8 Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. 9 He leads the

humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

We must never give up. We must never fall into unbelief in this. Christ IS changing us. He is teaching us and He is fashioning us. The more we cooperate with Him in this change, praying earnestly for His power and strength to work mightily in us, not leaning on ourselves, the more we will see of this change. In ourselves, in others, and in this church. Until, one day – this will be the order of the day this will be the order of the day:

(Phi 2:1-3 ESV) ESV Philippians 2:1 ¶ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.