

### 13. Learning to Explain the Unity of the Church

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand why Christ is superior to all. We saw that He possesses all of the fullness of the Godhead. At the same time, He is unique because He took on human flesh and became the God-Man. As the God-Man, He shed His blood on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin and make it possible for us to be reconciled to God. As a result, we now have peace with God. Today, we are going to see how this peace with God also makes it possible to experience unity in the church.

Colossians 1:21-23 says, “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight--if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.” Here, we see that we are reminded of what we were like before we were reconciled to God by the blood of Christ. The word that is translated “alienated” means *to be shut out from fellowship with God*. In fact, we see that we were enemies of God. The word that is translated “enemies” means *hateful or opposing God in our mind* (understanding). In the past, we were hateful toward God because we loved the evil works and sins that we were committing.

In contrast, at the moment of salvation we were reconciled to God through the death of Christ on the cross. Romans 5:9-10 says, “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” God was satisfied with the blood of Christ as the payment for our sins and so He could immediately have fellowship with us again.

However, we see that the payment of Christ did more than just make the payment for sin. Christ is now able to present us to the Father as holy, blameless and above reproach in His sight. We are holy because the righteousness of Christ has been placed on us. We are blameless because there are no longer any sins on our account. We are above reproach because no one can successfully bring any charge of sin against us. (Satan is the accuser of the brethren but God always answers that He is satisfied with the payment of Christ for our sin and the charge against us is dismissed.) That is why Romans 8:33 says, “Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is God who justifies.*” Satan may bring a charge against us but it will always be dismissed.

Paul said that this promise is true for every person who continues in the faith. Romans 11:22-23 says, “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.” Those who continue in the goodness of God can look forward to eternal blessing. Those who continue in unbelief can look forward to experiencing the severity of God throughout eternity.

All those who have been reconciled to God will continue in His goodness because they have been

given a new nature and have been sealed with the Holy Spirit as the down payment on their eternal life according to Ephesians 1:13-14 where we read, “In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Paul prayed for the Christians in Ephesians 3:17, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love.” When we place our faith in Christ, we are grounded on placed on the foundation of His love. “Steadfast” means *unmovable*. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” We can stand fast in the goodness of God because our hope is in Christ. This was the message that Paul shared wherever He took the Gospel.

As we come to Colossians 1:24-27 we read, “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Even though Paul was a prisoner for sharing the Gospel, he was filled with joy that he could suffer for the sake of Christ. He realized that Christ was allowing him to suffer for Christ’s sake. Like the other apostles, Paul could say in the words of Acts 5:41, “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” Paul counted it a privilege to share the afflictions of Christ.

Paul had the opportunity to share in the sufferings of Christ because He was suffering for the body of Christ, which is the church. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:10, “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” Paul viewed himself as a bondservant of Christ and a minister or servant of the church. He said that being a servant of the church was the stewardship that God had given to him. The word translated “stewardship” means *one who has the management of something that belongs to his master*. The Lord had called Paul to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, develop godly leadership in each city and appoint them to carry on the leadership of each local church. Paul had been faithful in carrying out this ministry.

The church had been a mystery that had been hidden in previous times and former generations. While Christ was on the earth, He revealed that He was going to build His church. In Matthew 16:18, Christ told Peter, ““And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”” Christ later told the apostles that they were to take the Gospel to every person of every nation. In the church, Christ brought Jews and Gentiles together. Ephesians 3:5-6 says, “Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” Here, we see that the Gospel brought the Jews and Gentiles together in the church and made us one in Christ.

In addition, God had not revealed that Christ would send the Holy Spirit to live in the life of every believer whether we are Jews or Gentiles. Ephesians 3:8-9 says, “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ.” In addition, Ephesians 1:13-14 says, “In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” From these verses and others, we see that every Gentile has the Holy Spirit living in our lives from the moment of salvation and He gives us the guarantee of our future glory with Christ in heaven.

Colossians 1:28-29 goes on to say, “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.” Paul was very thankful that Christ had given him the opportunity to share with the Gentiles the hope that we now have in Christ. The word that is translated “warning” means *instruction that is primarily a warning*. Paul used this word in 1 Corinthians 4:14 where we read, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn *you*.” As a result, some of the teaching of Paul included a warning. The word translated “teaching” means *to teach or explain*. Sometimes, Paul gave warnings and sometimes he explained what needed to be explained.

Whichever way he taught, Paul wanted to help each Christian to gain godly wisdom. The goal that Paul had was to present every Christian perfect in Christ. The word that is translated “perfect” means *mature or full grown*. Ephesians 4:13 says, “Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” The goal of Paul was to help every Christian grow and become like Christ. That should also be our goal as parents. We want to help our physical and spiritual children become like Christ.

We also see what Paul did in order to help Christians become like Christ. The word that is translated “labor” means *to work to the point of exhaustion*. The word that is translated “striving” was the word used to speak of putting forth every possible bit of energy to win in an athletic event. At the same time, Paul knew that the Lord was working in his life with great power. Philippians 2:13 says, “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.” We can also know that the Lord will work in our lives with great power as we yield our human spirit to the Holy Spirit moment by moment. We want to help our children understand that the Lord wants to work in their lives with great power also. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children grow and become more and more like Christ.