

The mystery revealed – Christ in you, and you in Christ

Last week we started our study of Colossians with an overview of the book, answering general observation questions, and thinking about a topical outline of the book. We also focused on the idea or theme of walking, which Paul uses as a metaphor in Colossians for how we live.

If you've been reading through Colossians these past few weeks, you may have noticed another theme that Paul develops in this letter to the church in Colossae: the incredible truth that for you who have put your faith in Christ, Christ is now living in you, and you are in Christ.

[Thank God in prayer for the gospel (or good news), the undeniable truth that God the Son became a man named Jesus, who lived a perfectly obedient life, died on a cross, rose again from the dead, and lives now and forever, rescuing people like you and me, forgiving us of our sins, and empowering us to live lives worthy of that gospel. Ask specifically for his help as we read, discuss, and meditate on Scripture.

Read Colossians out loud to each other, and this time listen for each time Paul mentions the idea of being in Christ (or the variations of in him, with him, or with Christ).

Again, I recommend using the attached PDF of Colossians from the ESV Bible, which has all headings, chapters, verses, and footnotes removed – just the text in a letter format, which is similar to what the Colossian church would have received from Paul back in the day.]

A mystery revealed

1. I didn't mention this earlier, but Paul also uses the word "mystery" several times in Colossians. Did you notice them?
2. Specifically, he uses the word four times, and three of those times are in 1:24 – 2:5, the section of the letter where he is describing his mission as an apostle of Christ Jesus. [Remember the outline from last week?]
3. I have had conversations with other Christians in the past who thought that Paul's use of the word "mystery" meant that it was something that we were not intended to know. But is that the case? Read 1:24 – 2:5 again and see what Paul is saying about this mystery.

4. Who was the mystery a mystery for? To ask that another way, who does Paul say did not know what the content of the mystery was?
5. What event in world history changed everything, and revealed what the mystery is?
6. What is the mystery? In which verses does he tell us exactly what that mystery is?
7. Paul isn't the only New Testament writer who writes about a mystery. Read 1 Peter 1:10–12. Peter doesn't use the word "mystery" specifically, but the same idea is there. Who wanted to know the details? Who does know them now? What are the different ways that Peter describes the gospel in this passage? [I count at least five.]

Christ in you

Let's look at how Paul arrives at the concept of Christ in you (or us).

1. In 1:24–25 Paul says that he was suffering and had been made a minister [servant] of the church [Christ's body] by God for a specific purpose. What was that purpose?
2. In verse 26 Paul uses the word "mystery" to refer back to something in verse 25. What is it?
3. That mystery, the word of God, has now been revealed to God's saints. Who are his saints? Are you one of them?
4. In verse 27, God chose to reveal to his saints (you, me, and all Christians) not only this mystery, but the "glory" of this mystery. And not only the "glory" of this mystery, but the "riches of the glory" of this mystery. Are you beginning to see that this mystery is an amazing and wonderful thing?
5. And finally he tells us specifically what this mystery is: Christ in you, the hope of glory. A present reality that is very real, right now, that guarantees a hope of future glory that cannot fail to happen.
6. Think about and discuss what it means to have Christ living in you. Does this mean that you are now an empty shell, with Christ living your life for you? [Hint: no!] Read Galatians 2:20 for more insight into this truth. There, Paul says that Christ is living in him, but he (Paul) still has to live his own life, but now he is living that life by faith in Jesus Christ.

You in Christ

Christ living in you is a reality because you are in Christ, what theologians refer to as being in union with Christ in his death and in his resurrection. Our union with Christ is a critical theme in Paul's letters, and Colossians is no exception.

1. In his greeting to the Colossians Paul is already developing the idea of being in Christ, referring to them as his faithful brothers (and sisters) in Christ.
2. In 1:28 Paul writes that his primary goal is to bring all Christians to maturity (or completeness), but not just maturity. He wants them (and us) to be mature **in Christ**. Christ in us makes this possible, but what does Paul say in this verse makes it happen? In other words, how do we become mature in Christ?
3. Read 2:6–7. How are we to walk (live)? And how are we to be rooted and built up?
4. Read 2:8-15. In this passage Paul is beginning to deal with false teachings and wrong ideas. Notice how critical our union with Christ is in fighting error and keeping us in the truth. What are the different ways that Paul describes our union with Christ in these verses?
5. In chapter three Paul is describing our new life in Christ and how we should be walking (living) our lives. Read 3:1–4. What makes it even possible for us to live the way Paul is instructing us to live? [Hint: verses 1 and 3 have the specific answers.]

Closing thoughts

To close, thank God that he has revealed the mystery of Christ to us through his word of truth, the gospel, that Christ is now living in us, and that we are in an unbreakable union with Christ, who is our hope of glory. Amen!