

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

“Holding Fast to Christ”

Feb 17, 2013

Sermon Text: Colossians 1:24-29

Scripture Reading: 1 Sam 5:1-12

Introduction-

Follow along now as I read again the first chapter of Colossians and let's refresh our minds in regard to Paul's argument and purpose:

(Colossians 1:1-29 ESV) ¶ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 ¶ To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. 3 ¶ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing - as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. 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. 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. 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. 24 ¶ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, 25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, 26 the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. 27 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Before we look at some specifics in verses 24-29, I want to make some general observations in keeping with Paul's primary theme and purpose – that we not be deceived by anyone who claims that we need more than Christ. Christ AND something. As we have seen this deception most often comes in the form of man-made traditions and rules that we supposedly

must follow if we are to be in a right standing with God.

First of all, think of our Scripture reading again from 1 Samuel 5, specifically looking at the first 5 verses –

¶ When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. 2 Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. 3 And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. 4 But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. 5 This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day. (1 Samuel 5:1-5 ESV)

The Philistines were enslaved to the Dagon god's religion. They never questioned the priests of Dagon. Never mind that truth, the ark of the real God, had come on the scene and toppled Dagon. Dagon is not to be

questioned. Dagon is propped up by his followers.

The very same kind of mentality is far too common among Christians today. We can virtually deify some well-known theologian or pastor or author and cease to look to God's Word as our ultimate authority. A certain sign we have begun to do this is seen in our reaction to criticism of that person. We see examples of this all the time. Blind loyalists block out the fact that Dagon's hands and head are broken off so that he is exposed as a god who sees not, nor can he act. And yet along come his priests and prop him back up again. Beware! There are many prominent figures in evangelicalism who have their devoted followers, and if you criticize them, even if your arguments are sound, you will be attacked by these "priests of Dagon."

Scripture is very plain – we are not to follow men. Notice in the following Scripture, Paul really is arguing the very same thing he has been saying in Colossians – Christ is ALL!

(1Co 1:4-12 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--

7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

10 ¶ I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.

12 What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."

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. (Colossians 1:15-23 ESV)

Isaiah 40 in Colossians 1

A second general observation I wanted to point out is that Paul's argument in chapter 1 is very similar to the line of reasoning we find in Isaiah 40—

¶ 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

Look at creation. Consider what the Lord has done. It tells us who He is, creator of all things. Therefore He is all that we need. There are no deficiencies in him. Now listen to Isaiah 40-

(Isaiah 40:21-31 ESV) Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

22 It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the

heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; 23 who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. 24 Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

25 To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. 26 Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing. 27 **Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"? 28 Have you not known? Have you not heard?** The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. 29 He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. 30 Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; 31 but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

This is the connection between SCIENCE and THEOLOGY. Science studies the creation, and from those studies we can clearly see some very important things about God both on the macro and micro levels. Look at the stars – lift up your eyes on high and see – *who created these?* He calls EACH ONE by name and never loses track of a single one. And how many stars are there? So why then do we say – our way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God. His understanding is unsearchable. Listen to this article:

HOW MANY STARS ARE THERE IN THE UNIVERSE?

[http://www.esa.int/Our_Activities/Space_Science/How_many_stars_are_there_in_the_Universe] --

Have you ever looked up into the night sky and wondered just how many stars there are in space? This question has fascinated scientists as well as philosophers, musicians and dreamers throughout the ages.

Look into the sky on a clear night, out of the glare of streetlights, and you will see a few thousand individual stars with your naked eyes. With even a modest amateur telescope, millions more will come into view.

So how many stars are there in the Universe? It is easy to ask this

question, but difficult for scientists to give a fair answer! Stars are not scattered randomly through space, they are gathered together into vast groups known as galaxies. The Sun belongs to a galaxy called the Milky Way. Astronomers estimate there are about 100 thousand million stars in the Milky Way alone. Outside that, there are millions upon millions of other galaxies also!

Hipparcos mapped millions of stars in our galaxy, but how many more are there? It has been said that counting the stars in the Universe is like trying to count the number of sand grains on a beach on Earth. We might do that by measuring the surface area of the beach, and determining the average depth of the sand layer.

If we count the number of grains in a small representative volume of sand, by multiplication we can estimate the number of grains on the whole beach.

For the Universe, the galaxies are our small representative volumes, and there are something like 10^{11} to 10^{12} stars in our galaxy, and there are perhaps something like 10^{11} or 10^{12} galaxies.

With this simple calculation you get something like 10^{22} to 10^{24} stars in the Universe. This is only a rough number, as obviously not all galaxies are the same, just like on a beach the depth of

sand will not be the same in different places. So there are between 10 sextillion and 1 septillion stars in the Universe. That's a large number of stars.

No one would try to count stars individually, instead we measure integrated quantities like the number and luminosity of galaxies. ESA's infrared space observatory Herschel, to be launched in 2007, will make an important contribution by 'counting' galaxies in the infrared, and measuring their luminosity in this range - something never before attempted. Knowing how fast stars form can bring more certainty to calculations. Herschel will also chart the 'formation rate' of stars throughout cosmic history. If you can estimate the rate at which stars have formed, you will be able to estimate how many stars there are in the Universe today.

He created them. He knows them by name.

So don't listen to someone who comes along and says Christ requires more of you than what He has done. You have Christ, creator and sustainer of the stars, and more. Therefore you have all. And never more say that He has forgotten your way!

Do We Complete Christ's Sufferings?

We should also address these verses and be certain we understand what Paul means –

(Colossians 1:24-26 ESV) ¶ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and **in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,** 25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, 26 the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

Does this mean that Christ did not complete the necessary sufferings to redeem us? Or that somehow the Christian must suffer in a meritorious manner? These things have all been taught and practiced in the history of the church – and even still today. Many Christians, and not necessarily Roman Catholics, believe that willfully choosing to remain in suffering earns God's favor.

Let's permit Scripture to answer the question for us --

Mat 5:11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely **on my account.** 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for

so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Act 5:41 Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor **for the name.**

2Co 1:5-8 For as **we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings,** so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

Phi 3:10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, **and may share his sufferings,** becoming like him in his death,

2Ti 1:8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, **but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,**

Understand it then? Christ's meritorious, redemptive sufferings for us are complete. It is finished. And yet Christ continues to suffer now because His body, the Church, suffers. Our suffering is a sharing in the suffering of Christ because we are persecuted for the name of Christ. We continue to announce the gospel in a world that hates the gospel. Paul is a servant of the gospel (vs 23) and thus he suffers, sharing in the sufferings of Christ as Christ's gospel continues to go forth. In this sense, the sufferings

of Christ are not completed yet and will not be until He comes again.

Douglas Moo puts it this way –

“What is lacking, then, needing to be ‘filled up,’ are the tribulations that are inevitable and necessary as God’s kingdom faces the opposition of the dominion of darkness. As members of Christ’s own body, his people participate in the sufferings of Christ Himself....Paul’s apostolic ministry is an extension of Christ’s work in the world, so Paul identifies his own sufferings very closely with Christ’s. These sufferings have no redemptive benefit for the church, but they are the inevitable accompaniment of Paul’s commission to proclaim the end-time revelation of God’s mystery. It is in this way that Paul’s sufferings are ‘on behalf of’ the church, including the Colossian Christians.” [Pillar Commentary]

APPLICATION: I see no reason why this suffering for Christ in the proclamation of the gospel would be limited only to the apostles. Scripture plainly indicates that all Christians are sharing/fellowshipping in the same suffering. Understanding this enables us to endure. We must not be surprised.

One of the tactics of evil is that it accuses. It works to convince the

innocent that THEY are the “troublers of Israel” when in fact the evil ones are the real troublers. But we can fall prey to this tactic if we are not on guard. The reformers were accused and burned, just as the early Christians were in the Roman Empire.

If you stand for Christ and serve Him, then you are going to be accused of being a fool, or of being evil, or of bringing all kinds of harm and trouble onto people. Expect it. Don’t fall for it. Don’t wear that guilt. If you do, it will tend to silence you.

(1 Kings 18:17-18 ESV) ¶ When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" 18 And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals.

Christians are not the troublers of our nation today – except to the extent that we compromise the gospel! The person who stands against evil is not a troublemaker. Our nation is not in the mess that it is because of Christians. It is troubled because of its departure from Christ.

The Gospel is For Everyone 1:27-29

(Colossians 1:27-29 ESV) To them God chose to make known how great

among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. 6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

We have already noted that whatever the particular false teaching was there in Colossae, it contained Jewish elements –

- Circumcision 2:11
- Questions of food and drink 2:16
- Festival, new moon, Sabbath 2:16

Notice here then Paul’s emphasis upon the gospel also being for the Gentiles. He speaks of the “mystery” that had been hidden, and when Paul uses that term, he is speaking of the fact that God’s salvation in Christ was always intended for all the nations, not just Israel. For example:

(Ephesians 3:1-6 ESV) ¶ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles-- 2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. 4 When you read this, you can perceive

So it is probable that the heresy which was threatening at Colossae was one that also included the teaching that you must not only believe in Christ, you had to be circumcised and submit to all kinds of various Jewish traditions to be right with God.

But the RICHES of our salvation, the glory of it, is that Christ IS in us! Now! And therefore we have this HOPE of glory. Not a “got my fingers crossed” hope, but a hope that is certain, and that hope is GLORY! It is the new creation, the resurrection, eternal life in a real place with a real body, with real people. We have this hope because we already have Christ in us. Christ is everything. Christ is Creator. We need nothing else.

APPLICATION: So, ask yourself – “Just what more do I think that I need?” In my own thinking or in things other people have told me, have I come to the conclusion that I am shameful before God even though I am His child in Christ? Am I looking and

looking and searching and searching for “something more”? Well, this is false thinking because the Christian by definition is one in whom Christ dwells. And if Christ is in us, our hope of glory is already a sealed and done deal.

The Gospel Ministry (vss 28-29)

Notice now Paul’s emphasis on Christ. Christ is the sum and substance of His ministry. Listen again –

(Colossians 1:27-3 ESV) To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, **which is Christ in you**, the hope of glory. 28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may **present everyone mature in Christ**. 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

ESV 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, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, 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**.

And then Paul gives his purpose in emphasizing the centrality of Christ –

(Colossians 2:4-5 ESV) I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Yes, we must be on guard against the arguments of obvious false systems that claim they believe the Bible, and that they believe in Christ – Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Adventism, Christian Science, and so on. But as we have repeatedly emphasized these past few weeks, the real danger for us is legalistic man-made systems which arise in our own ranks. They enslave. They destroy the joy that is in Christ. They create arrogance in us and in the end they drive people away from Christ.

Let me give you an example which shows how easily these things sneak up on us. Often they come from someone who is reputed to be “somebody.” Some notable who has been made a celebrity in the church. People sit up and listen and take what such people say as Bible truth. This example initially sounds harmless and humorous. But as you think it through, it isn’t because it is just another step toward permitting some power figure

to dominate our walk with Christ, to introduce mere man-made tradition into our lives and enslave us. So here we go – (I won't name the guy. I probably should, but I will just let his words speak. He is a big name and to many his word has been virtually God's word:

HOW TO WATCH THE SUPERBOWL

If you choose to watch the Super Bowl, here are four tips for watching the game for the glory of God.

1. Strategically assign the remote.

Some prefer to turn off all the commercials; other prefer to just keep an eye on it and turn off the offensive ones. Either way, be proactive about what shows up on your TV screen. One way to do this is to assign one person (someone with both discernment and quick reflexes) to remote-control duty.” This cannot be just anybody. Throughout the game viewers are assaulted with commercials—immoral commercials, commercials that assault and offend one's intelligence, and commercials with immodestly dressed women (which both tempt men and belittle women). These are as much a part of the Super Bowl as the game itself. Working the remote requires skill and coordination as well as discernment.

This person needs to be paying attention and anticipating commercial breaks. While everyone else enjoys the game, this person is working and always aware of what's on the TV.

I recommend you establish on the remote an alternative channel that presents no temptation (C-SPAN for example). Turning to C-SPAN will ensure that conversation will take place.

2. Watch proactively.

I encourage fathers to watch actively and discerningly, never passively and superficially. There is no doubt that throughout the game you will hear one superlative after another attributed to the skill of the athletes. The accent throughout the game will be on skill, not character.

Nowhere is the word great mentioned more often in our culture than in the context of professional sports. If you watch any game this weekend and listen to the announcer's commentary, then like a mantra you'll probably hear the word great repeated throughout—great, great, great. Yet it may well be that nowhere in our culture is the absence of true greatness more evident than in professional sports. So be careful about cultivating an excessive love for professional athletics in your child. Without minimizing the skill as a gift from God, I want to direct my

son's attention to character as theologically defined. So as he and I watch the game, I will draw his attention to any evidence of humility or unselfishness I observe, as well as any expression of arrogance or selfishness. I will celebrate the former and ridicule the latter.

3. Foster fellowship.

We need to make sure a room full of people are not simply passively watching the Super Bowl. Commercial time can be time redeemed with the right leadership and by a simply changing of the channel to C-SPAN.

Don't misunderstand. It's perfectly legitimate to watch and enjoy the game. I'm not advocating that you invite those who have no interest in the game and who want to distract your attention from the game. You can arrange to meet with those people at another time.

No matter who we invite to our homes on Sunday, let's not just stare at the TV, paying little attention to our families and our guests. Watching the game should involve building relationships.

4. Draw attention to the eternal. Sometime after the game—that same evening or the next day—it's helpful for a father to draw his child's

attention to the game in light of eternity. It's also helpful for us as fathers to be reminded of an eternal perspective.

Apart from those few who listen excessively to sports talk radio, this game will be quickly forgotten. Let me ask you this—who won the Super Bowl even five years ago?

The day before the 1972 Super Bowl, Dallas Cowboy running back Duane Thomas said, "If it's the ultimate game how come they're playing it again next year?" Some players seem to get it. Sadly, many fans don't.

I anticipate that in a week or two, after the Super Bowl has been won, the champions will experience this same dissatisfaction. As Augustine said, "You [God] made us for yourself, and our hearts find no peace till they rest in you."

We must impart this eternal perspective to our children.

And in conclusion, here are the official Super Bowl predictions:

I predict the 49ers by 17

False prophecy.

Now imagine sitting under this kind of teaching week after week in a church

or immersing yourself in the books of someone like this who will speak to your every single area of life, claim to be the expert, tell you what God's will is.... What is going to be the result?

Christ sets us free. Men and their traditions enslave us. Enjoy Christ and do not submit to the other.