



## CELL GUIDE

**TOPIC** The Centrality of Christ (Colossians 1:24–2:23) **SPEAKER** Elder Lok Vi Ming

**THEME** Book Study (Colossians) **DATE** 13 & 14 June 2020

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# MESSAGE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

The church at Colosse was the smallest among the 10 New Testament churches in Asia Minor; it was a city neither as prosperous nor as important as its neighbour Laodicea. Yet problems were growing in this young church; so serious was the heresy that had crept into the church that Paul had to pen a stirring proclamation of the superiority and supremacy of Christ to the Colossians. He hoped that through his letter, the Colossians would have the *“full riches of complete understanding”*, in order that they may *“know the mystery of God which is Christ”* (Col 2:1-2).

## THE HERESY IN THE COLOSSIAN CHURCH

False teachers were wreaking havoc in the Colossian church through the teachings that they preached. This led to discouragement among the believers, sowed discord and affected the unity of the believers. It also confused the believers as to the mystery of the true riches of wisdom.

There were two main components to the heresy taught by the false teachers:

### 1. **Gnosticism** (Gnosis: Greek for “knowledge”)

The Gnostics presented themselves as the spiritual aristocracy of the church, asserting exclusive access to direct revelation of the things of God, and therefore having a unique insight which was superior to all other Christian writings and beliefs.

### 2. **Syncretism** (the mixture of different religions, practices and cultures)

Colossian heresy combined Gnosticism and Syncretism, giving rise to a movement which mixed Judaistic legalism, beliefs and practices. It was a subtle and seductive heresy that did not require a purging of Christian beliefs and Jewish customs, but taught that Christ alone is not enough, and that Christian spirituality had to be supplemented. The syncretic mix in Colosse included religious and rabbinical traditions, circumcision, dietary considerations, the worship of angels, false humility and ascetic practices and sacrifices (i.e. the denial of fleshly desires) (Col 2:8-23).

Altogether, the Colossian heresy was an insidious one, because while it did not deny Christ, it dethroned Him. The heresy displaced Christ from the centre of believers’ lives by questioning the sufficiency of the work of the Christ and taught the believers that they needed more for salvation.

## PAUL'S REFUTING OF THE HERESY

In Col 2:3, Paul refutes the Gnostics' false teaching that the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Greek: "Apokruphos") could only be sought from within the Gnostics' books of knowledge ("Apokruphos") itself. Rather, true treasures of knowledge and wisdom were "Apokruphos" in Christ himself i.e. hidden in Jesus.

When we accepted Jesus into our lives, we became children of God with immediate, direct and full access to the treasures of God, which are hidden in Christ Jesus. The treasures of God are the truths of God and the mystery of God is "Christ in us, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27).

Paul teaches the young Colossian believers that the richness of their lives depended solely on their relationship with Christ, without the need for any supplements. He instructs the believers to walk in Jesus the same way they had received Him, giving three images to illustrate this walk (Col 2:6-7).

### 1) ROOTED IN CHRIST (Agricultural metaphor)

Roots hold a tree to the ground and take in water and nutrients from the ground, enabling the tree to be firmly established and grow. No other part of the tree is given these functions. Like tree roots, these disciplines are unseen but crucial to grounding our faith and nourishing our spirit. We do not cultivate disciplines to score points with God but to grow in our relationship with Christ. Likewise, Paul encourages believers to be rooted in Christ, for He alone is sufficient. For us, this means exploring the faith, reading and searching the word, cultivating the discipline of prayer, and devoting time to intercession.

### 2) BUILT UP IN HIM (Agricultural metaphor)

A building is not put up overnight but is the result of preparation and careful planning by talented architects and designers. Similarly, when we build and rebuild our lives, God is the Great Designer at work. He knows our frame, the strength of our foundation, our capabilities, and also our limitations. He works in our lives like how a potter works his clay or a skilled worker refines his gold, in order to create a masterpiece (Eph 2:10).

### 3) ESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH (Legal metaphor)

To be established is to be shown by the facts as assured, correct, and certain. For example, a marriage certificate is an article of fact that establishes the marital relationship between a man and a woman.

The life we have in Christ is a life that is based on assurance, backed up by evidence. We have the assurance from a promise-keeping God that He cares for us, and He makes accessible to us the treasures that are in Christ. God's assurances are not conditional upon our ability to love or obey Him; He loves us regardless of our faults, just as He had saved us while we were still sinners. We need to live our lives established upon the truth that God loves us, Christ died for our salvation, and that Christ alone without my help or sacrifice is sufficient for me to live a life that will bear fruit in every good work. Our faith is fully established on God's promises – we do not need supplementary assurances from our own actions or the guarantee of others.

Paul rounds these instructions with an exhortation to the believers to be overflowing with thanksgiving (Col 2:7). A life well-lived in the Lord is not an accomplishment but a blessing. Such a life will reap rewards in the course of living it, because when we are conscious of God's leading, guiding and loving, we can only respond with gratitude and thanksgiving.

## CONCLUSION

Christ alone is sufficient for our salvation, faith and life. We access the treasures hidden in Christ when we enter into a true, vibrant and living relationship with Him. God doesn't need us to do any more for Him, but He will like us to love Him more, by placing Jesus in the very centre of our lives.

## QUESTIONS

1. According to Paul, how should we walk in Christ? How have you personally done so?

2. What are some spiritual "supplements" your life that you depend on instead of Christ?

3. What does it mean for us to put Christ at the centre of our lives? How can you do so in your life?