

bb-TBC-62 Receiving Christ

📅 Due Date	@July 7, 2022
Σ days to go	0
☰ Status	Scheduled
☰ Working Title	Receiving Christ
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☰ Priority	High !!! Pattern
☰ Context	Bible Study Deliverable NLR Preaching
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Introduction

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Last time...

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Next time...

Introduction

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Last time...

we ended our last time together with a reference to Paul's letter to the Colossians

The Pattern of the Exodus

The pattern of the Exodus and the Sinai covenant is frequently just under the surface in the New Testament writings.

The language with which they describe the New Covenant is taken from the events of the Passover and Exodus and the Conquest of the Land. A good example of this is found in the epistle to the Colossians...

So we have Old Covenant ideas and symbols which give us a language with which can begin to describe the greater glories of the New Covenant.

So, the pattern of the Exodus and the Sinai covenant is frequently just under the surface in the New Testament writings. The language with which they describe the New Covenant is taken from the events of the Passover and Exodus and the Conquest of the Land.

A good example of this is found in the epistle to the Colossians. Colossians is a very helpful letter and can serve a very valuable purpose other than that for which it was first written.

The saints in Colossae

It was written to a gathering of 'saints' in the city of Colossae who were coming under pressure from a philosophical view that was happy to regard 'Christ' as a relevant ingredient in salvation but which did not see Christ as 'all and in all' as Paul described him. Its valuable purpose for today is the same as an answer to all who would regard Christ as 'making a valuable contribution' but who do not regard him as the Only Way, the Only Truth and the Only Life.

However, we can use it for a second purpose, it will enable us to get a biblical sense of what the early Christians meant by 'receiving Christ'.

Paul encourages the community at Colossae to continue in the way in which they began their pilgrimage with the words;

▼ Col 2:6-7

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.
(Colossians 2:6–7 NKJV)

It is plain that Paul regarded these 'saints' as having authentically 'received Christ Jesus the Lord'. The thing that makes the letter so valuable is that Paul had never met any of them.

His conviction that they had truly 'received Christ Jesus the Lord' was based on eye-witness evidence from a colleague who we know as Epaphras. The little we know of Epaphras makes us wish we knew more, much more.

He had been a faithful messenger of the gospel to the people in Colossae and had seen this group of men and women being transformed. Epaphras continued to support them with his love and fervent prayer. It has been said that 'it was Epaphras kneeling which kept the church in Colossae standing'.

We can do a little detective work in the epistle to the Colossians to discover just what it was that Epaphras wrote to Paul that caused Paul to conclude that these people had 'received Christ Jesus the Lord'. We don't know all that Paul heard but there is enough evidence to show clearly how Paul understood the phrase.

Receiving Christ

Studying the epistle to the Colossians will also serve this purpose. It will help us to distinguish between subjective experience and objective reality. Some aspects of being in the New Covenant community can be felt and touched. The Bible would use the word 'tasted'; this word means much more than 'sampled'.

The Evidence, as reported by Ephaphras

When the Scriptures speak of Christ 'tasting death for every man', they do not mean that he 'sampled' death but that he 'experienced' it consciously.

▼ Hebrews 2:9 NKJV

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might **taste** death for everyone. (Hebrews 2:9 NKJV)

▼ Hebrews 6:4–5

For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have **tasted** the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have **tasted** the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, (Hebrews 6:4–5 NKJV)

There are some aspects of genuine Christianity that can be 'tasted' or experienced consciously or subjectively but there are other truths which are just as true but which must be received by objective 'revelation'.

We shall see the implications of this as we examine the invisible pattern upon which Paul bases his epistle. Epaphras had witnessed and reported to Paul key aspects of the Colossian's experience and Paul bases his letter on his conviction that these key aspects show that they have 'received Christ'.

Epaphras had reported their 'faith in Christ Jesus',

as Paul writes... We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus... Col 1:3-4 NKJV. Many regard John 3:16 as the golden verse of the Bible with its statement that...

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. But many who quote it do not realise that we need to go back at least 2 verses to get a Biblical definition of 'believing';

▼ John 3:14-16

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life John 3:14-16 NKJV.

Faith is not mental assent to a series of doctrinal propositions but a personal, life or death, reliance on God's only remedy for our condition.

I have an old family Bible with a colour plate by Harold Copping that illustrates the event. A distraught mother is cradling her teenage son in her arms and the father

desperately tries to get him to open his eyes to look at the bronze snake on its pole. All he has to do is 'Look and live', but he must look away from his own condition and the snakes still crawling around his body and fix his gaze on God's provision.

When Epaphras reported that they had 'faith in Christ Jesus' he means this kind of absolute reliance, this "all your eggs in one basket" kind of faith, not upon an idea, but in the person of Christ himself. This faith is a personal encounter between the Colossians and the living Christ.

Epaphras has also reported on their 'love for all the saints'.

since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as *it has* also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as *it is* also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit. (Colossians 1:4–8 NKJV)

(Col 1:4) and further that the love they have expressed is 'love in the Spirit' (Col 1:8) John later wrote...We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. 1 John 3:14 NKJV. This 'love' for the brethren is one of the true 'initial evidences' of the Spirit's coming.

There is a wonderful and famous testimony that will illustrate my point; "In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart." These are the words from John Wesley's journal dated Wednesday 24th May, 1738.

The last sentences are seldom quoted but Wesley's instinct to 'pray with all my might' for his persecutors is a sure expression of the love of God poured out in a man's heart by the Holy Spirit.

▼ Romans 5:5–8

Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:5–8 NKJV)

this distinguishes 'the love of God' from every other kind of love. There are many stories of human love that included a death for another... but what kind of 'other person'.

Christ died for us with a love that consciously chose to die for the unworthy, the sinners, not for the righteous or deserving...

This conscious love is not to be confused with emotion or sentimentality. It is not human love on a grand scale but a love of a completely different order. In his epistle to the Romans Paul declares that the reason he is not embarrassed, or as the NKJV. translates it 'disappointed' is... because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Rom 5:5 NKJV. For Paul the love of God poured out 'within' the heart is a clear evidence of a supernatural event. He continues, in Romans, to illustrate the nature of the 'love of God' and distinguishes it from the highest forms of human love.

It was God's love, in the power of the Spirit, that Epaphras had seen in the Colossian believers and Paul had drawn his own conclusions.

Epaphras reported the evidence of new life

Epaphras had also clearly reported that the Colossians were showing the evidence of new life in fruit and as Paul recounts it...

▼ Col 1:6

and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; Col 1:6 NKJV.

Perhaps this is the sum of it all. They had 'heard and knew the grace of God in reality'. The word translated 'truth' can often be translated 'reality' in the New Testament. They had heard and knew God's grace authentically. This was no play-acting or a mere cosmetic change. This was the real thing!

Experience and Revelation

I am not thinking in terms of 'state and standing' that you may have encountered in books from early Christian Brethren writers. I'm not comfortable with that language, so I'm going to talk about Experience and Revelation.

These subjective, personally experienced, truths might have been the testimony of any of the saints at Colossae.

They might not have used these words but if asked they would have been able to say 'I know'.

"I know that I have put all my trust in the person of Jesus Christ himself."

"I know that he has poured out the Spirit of God's own love in my heart. I know that I have genuinely received the grace of God."

and others would have been able to say;

"their life is bearing fruit"

I had an old preacher friend who used to say;

"When people say 'I believe' they usually mean they are trying to believe.

When they really believe they say 'I know'".

These are elements of the New Covenant ...in action, and there are no doubt others, but these were all the evidence that Paul needed.

He had no hesitation in discerning that these people had 'received Christ', and his counsel was simply to continue as they had begun.

These are the tangible, taste-able, evidences of the New Covenant but there are other elements that are just as true although the saints may not have tasted or experienced them.

We will turn to these and see the underlying pattern of Paul's thinking. Although he never mentions the words he is thinking about the Exodus, Sinai and the Promised Land and using language which has its roots in the Exodus.

There is more, much more...

The truth that we experience and to which we can personally testify is only the tip of the iceberg; there's more, much more. This is why Paul frequently prays that the saints will receive 'revelation' or as here in Colossians...

▼ Col 1:9 NKJV

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; Col 1:9 NKJV.

Let's talk about 'spiritual understanding'...

Revelation is God's work

Revelation is God's work.

▼ Matthew 16:17 NKJV

Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 16:17 NKJV)

Only he can lift the veil and reveal truth. We may have the words of Scripture and be assisted by able and God-gifted teachers but this is God's prerogative and he alone can do it. Personal faith is, in truth, simply the right response to revelation.

We cannot create revelation but when we receive that inner sense of the truth and know that its origin is God himself, we are required to respond to it. To 'reckon' it so,

but only when God has made it plain.

It is safe to...

▼ Rom 6:11

...reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom 6:11.

But only if we...

▼ Rom 6:3

...know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Rom 6:3 and that... knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. Rom 6:6-7 NKJV.

If we are without this inner knowledge and conviction that has come through revelation but then try to 'reckon' a thing true we stand in danger of behaving presumptuously and are likely to suffer major problems in our future pilgrimage.

So Paul prays for 'revelation' and 'spiritual understanding' to enable the Colossians to...

▼ Col 1:10

walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; Col 1:10 NKJV.

It was part of Ezekiel's description of the New Covenant that those who had received a new heart and spirit would experience more; the promise continues...

▼ Ezek 36:27

I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Ezek 36:27 NKJV.

Paul believed that those who have 'received Christ Jesus the Lord' are able to receive truth from God that will enable them to live their lives in a way that always pleases him, and he does not hesitate to pray for it to be so. Do we? He also believed and prayed that this walking in a way that was 'fully pleasing' to God would cause a continuing increase in the true knowledge of God.

The Faith of Paul

And he was praying these things for people that we would normally describe as new converts.

Q. Where did he gain such faith?

A. From an understanding of the comprehensively 'better covenant'.

▼ Jeremiah 31:34

And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more. (Jeremiah 31:34 ASV)

He continues to tell the Colossians what he is praying for and for what he is already giving thanks and it is in this thanksgiving that we see his underlying patterns of thought so clearly;

▼ Col 1:12-14

giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.
Col 1:12-14 NKJV.

In these three verses he speaks of

1. inheritance,

2. exodus
3. and deliverance.

Perhaps if we reverse Paul's order we shall see the pattern emerging.

Redemption through blood, was foreshadowed in the Passover.

Deliverance from the power of darkness **into another kingdom** was foreshadowed in the Exodus and Sinai. **The inheritance** is a foreshadowing of the Promised Land and its possession.

But these are not future pictures that Paul is painting.

They are all things that have already been accomplished.

His readers may not have personally 'tasted' or 'experienced' these truths but, if they have received Christ Jesus as Lord, they are just as true as if they had. Paul is extrapolating. If this is true then so is this.

- If it is true that you have placed full reliance upon God's provision for salvation in the person of Jesus Christ,
- if it is true that the Holy Spirit has poured out in your hearts the love of God, if it is true that you heard and knew the grace of God in reality,
- if it is true that you received Christ Jesus the Lord... then these things are also true.

These are not subjective experiences but are, nevertheless, objective realities. They are not truths that they have personally experienced or 'tasted'. They are not subjective truths but objective truths.

Those who have 'received Christ Jesus the Lord' had become part of God's people and their history includes a fulfilled Passover, a fulfilled Exodus, a fulfilled Sinai and a fulfilled Inheritance.

If we lived in the consciousness of these great spiritual facts how would we walk? Little wonder then that Paul's frequent prayer is for revelation

▼ Eph 1:15-20

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your

understanding being enlightened;

- that you may know what is the hope of His calling,
- what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,
- and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe,

according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, (Ephesians 1:15–20 NKJV)

Next time...

we will take the time to examine these three areas of objective truth, trues that are true for us even if we have not personally tasted them...

▼ Col 2:6-7

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.
(Colossians 2:6–7 NKJV)

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