

The Gospel in Adventism

Week Nine



inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Colossians 1:24–29



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THE WAY OF LIFE

When visiting a new town, Adventist ministers often debated with the Sunday-keeping pastors over the Sabbath. In their zeal to defend God's law, Jesus and the gospel were sometimes eclipsed. Adventist evangelists at the time often used a painting called *The Way of Life* in their sermons. In the earliest versions, God's law, not the cross, is centered, accurately depicting what Adventists used to believe about the law's centrality in the plan of salvation. In 1880, James White commissioned a new edition of the painting in which Jesus on the cross replaced the law at the center, illustrating a shift in thinking. (To see these two illustrations, visit adventist-review.org/magazine-article/the-way-of-life/.) At the GC session in 1888, A.T. Jones and E.J. Waggoner appealed to church leaders to embrace a more Christ-centered gospel message, which some preachers and administrators felt would undermine the pillars of the Adventist message.

Ellen White was deeply concerned by the backlash that arose against Jones and Waggoner. She wrote very strong letters to pioneers such as Uriah Smith urging them not to resist the message. Jones and Waggoner presented little that was new, but they did call for a fresh perspective that emphasized Jesus and the gospel. In the following years, Ellen White authored several books that clearly articulated the gospel of Christ: *Steps to Christ* (1892), *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings* (1896), *The Desire of Ages* (1898), and *Christ's Object Lessons* (1900). This week's lesson will explore the meaning of the gospel's promise of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).



inScribe

Write out Colossians 1:24–29 from the translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out a portion of the primary passage. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you

Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

Memorize your favorite verse in the primary passage. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

Are there any issues that you have given undue attention to that you feel you need to reprioritize?

How could the law in Galatians be seen as both the ceremonial and the moral law?



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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LAW AND FAITH

The debates leading up to 1888 were initially over the role the law plays in salvation. One passage of particular contention was Galatians 3:24, 25, which describes the law as the “tutor” that brings us to Christ. The question was whether this tutor and guide is the moral law (the Ten Commandments) or the ceremonial law (the Jewish sacrificial system). This question sparked huge debates and inspired many camp meeting sermons and magazine articles. Older preachers like Uriah Smith and G.I. Butler believed the tutor to be the ceremonial law, explaining that it was the sacrificial system that led to Jesus, whose sacrifice freed us from that very system (v. 25). Younger preachers such as A.T. Jones and E.J. Waggoner believed the tutor to be the moral law—the Ten Commandments—since they point out our sins and should cause us to turn to God for cleansing.

Many Adventists adamantly believed that if the tutor is the moral law, people could use it to argue that the Ten Commandments and therefore the Sabbath have been done away with, because verse 25 says we are no longer under the tutor. When asked if the tutor was the moral law or the ceremonial law, Ellen White answered that it was both: “I am asked concerning the law in Galatians. What law is the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ? I answer: Both the ceremonial and the moral code of ten commandments” (*Selected Messages*, vol. 1 [1958], 233). It’s instructive to look back in Adventist history and reflect on issues that sparked such passionate debate at the time. Sometimes the issues we think are so significant do not turn out to be quite as consequential as we once thought. These realizations should cause us to reflect on the issues we debate in our churches today.

The focal point of the debates was the law in Galatians, but Jones’ and Waggoner’s primary burden lay elsewhere. They focused on showing the relationship between the law and faith, thereby demonstrating that it’s possible to live a Christ-centered, faith-filled, law-abiding life. Their message could be summarized as “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27), which when understood correctly is the essence of how we ought to live our Christian lives. As we have previously noted, the focus of Adventist preaching up to this time was on the landmark doctrines of the church such as the Second Coming, the Sabbath, and the sanctuary, but church doctrine cannot be separated from the reality of the cross. It’s a proper understanding of what happened at the cross that helps us experience the practical aspects of our doctrinal foundations. Whenever the cross is separated from doctrinal understanding, practical Christianity suffers.

Paul wrote the epistle of Colossians to the church in Colossae, which was geographically very close to Laodicea. These two neighboring towns shared similar histories and cultures. Today, they are only separated by a few miles and therefore share the same climate and valley. When Paul wrote to believers in Colossae, he included believers in Laodicea, addressing them both as one audience, dealing with the same spiritual challenges (Col. 2:1; 4:13, 15, 16). (Cont. on p. 77.)

THE ULTIMATE AIM

Christians have many good aspirations. We wish to be kinder to others and Christlike in conduct. We desire to help the downtrodden and want to share truth. But even the best aspirations will fail when our ultimate goal is in any way secondary. The Christian's ultimate purpose in everything is found in Colossians 1:27: "Christ in you." The indwelling Christ is called a mystery in these verses because it is not naturally comprehended. Christ in us describes a spiritual reality rather than a physical one. That the spirit and character of Christ can live in and through broken, sinful human beings like us is the great mystery that captures the attention of the world.

Colossians 1:26–28 makes it clear that God is ready to unfold the mystery of "Christ in you," which results in every man being presented "perfect in Christ Jesus." Righteousness by faith is exactly that: receiving righteousness through the indwelling Christ. Believing that our hearts are changed and that we're forgiven despite how we feel is how we practically claim by faith the promise of God's Word. Faith is trusting that Christ will accomplish what He promised in His Word. There is creative power in God's Word; God's voice has the power to create something out of nothing and speak light into the darkest hearts (Ps. 33:6–9; 2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus is that creative Word made flesh. "Christ in you" is the transforming experience we all need. It's something none of us can create or do for ourselves. It's opening ourselves up to those things that only God can do in us.

Paul saw no value in his own works apart from Christ. His most earnest desire was to experience Christ working in him and through him: "To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily" (Col. 1:29). Today, if there were more people who recognized their complete helplessness apart from Christ, there would be more people who had the power of Christ working through them continually. Jesus is looking for people who are emptied of self and open to being filled with His mighty works. The rich experience of "Christ in you" is just as available now as it has ever been.

Colossians 2 warns of various distractions that threaten the experience of living with "Christ in you." Chapter 3 returns to the theme of what it means to have "Christ in you": First, Christ dwelling within means the mind is fixed on things above, not on things of the earth (Col 3:1–3). Second, it means we put off the works of the flesh such as "anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, [and] filthy language" (v. 9). Christ dwelling within means we put off the works of the flesh and instead "put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering" (v. 12) and all the other attributes of Jesus. "Above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (v. 14). The verbs in chapter 3 are key to understanding righteousness by faith. The believer "puts off" the works (cont. on p. 77)



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks overall seem to point to?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

What things prevent us from experiencing Christ continually dwelling in us?



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What relationship do the following verses have with Colossians 1:24–29?

Ezekiel 36:25–27

Romans 5:8–10

Romans 8:1–4

Galatians 2:20

Galatians 3:24, 25

Colossians 3:1–3

Hebrews 8:10–12

Revelation 3:14–22

What other verses come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

(Cont. from inGest, p. 75):

The close connection between Colossae and Laodicea makes Paul's letter to the Colossians especially applicable to God's people today. Laodicea is the last of the seven churches in the book of Revelation and symbolizes God's church in the last days (Rev. 3:14–22). Perhaps Jones and Waggoner were on to something very important when they drew the attention of the church to "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

(Cont. from inTerpret, p. 76):

of the flesh and "puts on" the righteousness of Christ. When we accept Jesus by faith, He covers us with His own pure white robe of righteousness (see also Rev. 19:8). Believers depend on Christ's righteousness to continually cover us, dwell in us, and flow through us.

Review your memorized verse from Colossians 1:24–29.

THE HOPE OF GLORY

It's possible to understand the idea of righteousness while still being ignorant of the nature of God's righteousness. This leads us to try to establish our own righteousness outside of Christ. Righteousness is ultimately the experience of a change in standing before God. "Without the presence of Jesus in the heart, religious service is only dead, cold formalism.... when Christ is in us the hope of glory, we are constantly directed to think and act in reference to the glory of God" (Ellen White, *That I May Know Him* [1964], 193). When Christ dwells in us continually, it completely reorients our priorities, our responses, and our views on everything. There's nothing that remains unchanged when Jesus is dwelling in the heart.

The central message of Scripture is the gospel, and at the heart of the gospel is the power of Christ over sin. Only through a union with Christ can anyone overcome sin—a union that's ultimately a mystery. It's a mystery that Jesus would willingly volunteer to be the Sacrifice for sin, that the divine Creator of the world could enter Mary's womb and be born as a baby, that Jesus could be simultaneously fully divine and fully human, that Jesus can abide in our filthy, dirty hearts and clean them up.

In some ways, the fact that Jesus would dwell in the hearts of corrupt people is unsurprising. When He was born on earth, His manger was in a dirty, smelly barn. If Jesus can be born in such a lowly and despised place, have no doubt that He can enter our hearts today regardless of the condition, our past, our addictions—anything. No matter what we've done, Jesus is able to enter if we open ourselves to Him.

Not only is "Christ in you" a mystery, it's described as the "hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). One biblical definition for glory is that it refers to God's name or character. Having Christ in our hearts means His character is imprinted in our lives. It's not just a theory; it becomes practical and tangible as the profession of our faith is lived out in our words, actions, and innermost thoughts. Matthew 7:16 says we will be known by our fruits, and when Christ is in us, the fruits of the Spirit (see Gal. 5:22, 23) are evident to all. Salvation isn't an abstract process; it's something Jesus is personally involved in with each of us as He dwells in our hearts. All this deep work that Jesus does within us shows God's incredible love and care for us.



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Meditate on the primary passage again and look for where Jesus is.



In what ways is Christ abiding in us the same as Christ allowing His Father to abide in Him? Is it different in any way? (John 17:20–23.)

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

What is He saying to you personally through these texts?

Prayer Response:



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Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?

After this week's study of the
chapter, what are some personal
applications you are convicted
of in your life?

What are some practical
applications you must make in
your school, family, workplace,
and church life?



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UPLIFTING THE SAVIOR

"The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones.* This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God. Many had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes directed to His divine person, His merits, and His changeless love for the human family. All power is given into His hands, that He may dispense rich gifts unto men, imparting the priceless gift of His own righteousness to the helpless human agent. This is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel's message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure.

"The uplifted Saviour is to appear in His efficacious work as the Lamb slain, sitting upon the throne, to dispense the priceless covenant blessings, the benefits He died to purchase for every soul who should believe on Him. John could not express that love in words; it was too deep, too broad; he calls upon the human family to behold it. Christ is pleading for the church in the heavenly courts above, pleading for those for whom He paid the redemption price of His own lifeblood. Centuries, ages, can never diminish the efficacy of this atoning sacrifice. The message of the gospel of His grace was to be given to the church in clear and distinct lines, that the world should no longer say that Seventh-day Adventists talk the law, the law, but do not teach or believe Christ.

"The efficacy of the blood of Christ was to be presented to the people with freshness and power, that their faith might lay hold upon its merits. As the high priest sprinkled the warm blood upon the mercy seat, while the fragrant cloud of incense ascended before God, so while we confess our sins and plead the efficacy of Christ's atoning blood, our prayers are to ascend to heaven, fragrant with the merits of our Saviour's character. Notwithstanding our unworthiness, we are ever to bear in mind that there is One that can take away sin and save the sinner. Every sin acknowledged before God with a contrite heart, He will remove. This faith is the life of the church. As the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness by Moses, and all that had been bitten by the fiery serpents were bidden to look and live, so also the Son of man must be lifted up, that 'whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' " (Ellen White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, [1923], 91, 92.)

* Ellen White wrote this in 1896 before Jones and Waggoner strayed from the faith. She is not here espousing everything they ever published.



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



How can we respectfully disagree with others without causing unnecessary offense and division? Similarly, how can we remain Christians when being attacked for what we believe?

What is the intended purpose of the law?

What can we do to ensure we stay focused on the key issues and not trip over minor details?

How is Paul's message to the Colossians especially relevant to the end-time Laodicean church?

In what ways do we allow the law to eclipse Jesus and the gospel? How can we avoid this?

What does it mean to really live and experience "Christ in us" on a day-to-day basis?

What distractions threaten to prevent us from keeping "Christ in us" constantly?