

God's Word IS Working in You ¹

✠ **reconciled** (vv.21-23)

✠ **enlightened** (vv.24-27)

✠ **complete** (vv.28-29)

In the Name of Jesus, always working for you 24/7, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, dear friends:

Years ago at a missionaries conference we were talking about how to reach the lost for Christ. One of the older pastors was so discouraged. It was strange because he personally made more calls than the rest of us put together. But he kept saying, "It's not working. It's just not working." You know how he felt if you've played basketball or soccer and everyone else is scoring, but your shots are missing the net. Or everyone else is reeling in fish while you're only getting tangled weeds.

God knew there would be times we'd need this encouragement. And God's chosen instrument for writing it would need extreme circumstances to make it authentic. We don't just need to know **God's Word IS Working** as we heard last week. You need to know **God's Word IS Working in You**.

✠ **reconciled** (vv.21-23)

When I was in about sixth grade, we had a boy on our baseball team with only one hand. He would hold his mitt with his short arm, throw with his hand, then put the mitt back on in time to catch the ball. He was one of the best players I've ever seen at any age, much better than the rest of us.

In order to see how awesome it is that **God's Word IS Working in You**, you need to go back and look at how we were before God **reconciled** us to Himself. We weren't just handicapped. Paul points out in our first verse: "*Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.*" Estranged or *alienated* from family is painful enough, but how distressing and even destructive to be *alienated* from God. How can Paul say that all of us "*were enemies in [our] minds because of [our] evil behavior*"? It's because God's Law tells us to be perfect and holy like God, but no matter how hard we try, we fail. And then God's Law says even if you get it right all the time but trip up once, you're guilty of breaking the whole Law. (James 2:10) The penalty is eternal death in hell. (Romans 6:23) How could any sinner not hate someone so holy, so unyielding in perfection?

God cannot deny His essence. He is absolutely just. His justice must punish every sin. But God is also absolutely merciful. So He found a way to take all our sin and guilt on Himself. God gave His Son a *body* through the womb of the Virgin Mary. In His *physical body* Christ lived under God's Law, kept it perfectly in our place, then suffered an innocent death as our Substitute. Now how can you turn away from such infinite love for you? In God's sight you are **reconciled** and made holy, *free from accusation*.

But this will only keep on blessing "*if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.*" This is still the New Covenant. No *if* in that. But it's far too easy to get blown off faith's foundation by forgetting it's all about Jesus, not us. To get mushy and soft in our faith, failing to flex our spiritual muscles by putting our faith into action. To get distracted from our heavenly hope by earthly things that cannot last or satisfy. Paul was not afraid of losing control of the Colossian congregation; he didn't even found it. He feared for his fellow Christians who could lose their faith because of false teaching. Would Paul have any less concern for us in this day and age?

¹ S#1632 on Colossians 1:1-14, introduces this theme in broad application. [M.C. 7/13/2016]

✠ **enlightened** (vv.24-27)

One of my personal discoveries from back surgery was about patience. I was anything but. Only in the hospital less than 48 hours, but not being able to do the things I usually do? I kept wondering where did that word “patient” come from? Imagine Paul, chained under house arrest in Rome. He had already traveled thousands of miles on foot and sailing ship to bring the Gospel to Asia Minor and Europe. How could he be patient and even rejoicing? In a dark prison, how does a Christian keep the lights on?

There is one thing needful that enlightens our souls and drives away fear and frustration. This is truly amazing: *“Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.”* Paul could not contribute anything toward our salvation. Jesus said on the cross, *“It is finished!”* (John 20:30) But remember how Jesus warned that the world would hate His disciples as it hated Him? In our families and society with violence, death and war all over the world, when we Christians suffer, Christ suffers. But there is a limit. The Day known only to God will fill up the suffering cup. God’s patience will finally say, “Enough!” The last trumpet will sound an end to all Christian suffering forever in glory with God.

Your willingness to suffer for Christ shows **God’s Word IS Working in You**. This *“mystery”* no one could ever know unless God pulled back the curtain. It was hidden in Old Testament times under sacrifices and dietary laws. God chose the people of Israel to nurture the *“mystery”* until God would reveal it in His Messiah and the apostles. Through Paul in particular God included all of us Gentiles, non-Jews, in His plan for heaven. That *“mystery...is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”*

✠ **complete** (vv.28-29)

Paul admonishes us not to fall for religious experts who come along every generation. All claim deeper spirituality than mere Christian doctrine. But Paul extols Christ as all-sufficient. His love and His wisdom are all we need to endure and triumph home to heaven. *“We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.”* In Him you are **complete** with guilt-free righteousness that opens wide heaven’s door to God’s loving arms eager to hold you like His child home at last. Paul poured everything into proclaiming Christ, agonizing like an athlete. *“To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.”*

Do you realize how **powerfully** Christ is working **in You**? It happens naturally without us even realizing it. Singing psalms and hymns puts godly admonition to music to nestle in our hearts and minds. We counsel minds and hearts in fellowship time together, over a cup of coffee, at a meeting, work day, or fellowship event. Whenever Christians get together, they help each other see things more clearly. The Holy Spirit kindly graces these times with blessing through His Word in public and private.

Someone said it was really hot the second Saturday for our VBS canvassers. Reminds me of the ‘80’s – time and temperature, humidity draining. As I walked up to a home in Vadnais Heights, a woman shouted, “All right, what’re ya selling?” “I’m giving it away.” “Wadded got, money?” “No, it’s much better than that.” She ended up inviting neighbors into their living room, two couples asking faith-family-marriage questions. I still pray for them – and savor the two Pepsis they gave me coming and going.

Fourteen individuals – members, friends and a former member, some on both Saturdays put twenty people on the street while I was away at Summer School. We don’t know how God is working through their witness. That mystery is not yet revealed. But even though none showed up at VBS, the Gospel still goes with God’s promise that His Word will not return empty, but will accomplish His saving purpose. And our VBS with so many excited kids and other families that joined ours – that’s clearly God working with energy **in You**. Don’t miss the miracle **in You!** As Paul wrote in another letter, *“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”* (1 Corinthians 15:58 NIV84) *“Not in vain”* because it’s all done for Jesus. To Him alone be glory and praise forever. Amen.

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