

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 228

Colossians 1:21-2:5

August 11, 2018

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Episode Summary

This episode continues our discussion of the epistle to the Colossians. Colossians 1:21-2:5 touch on some theological themes familiar from previous episodes of the podcast: the relationship of Israel and the Church, the need to keep believing the gospel for salvation, reconciliation, and Paul's "mystery" teaching. There are also some surprises.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, episode 228: Colossians 1:21 through 2:5. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing?

MH: I'm doing better today; yesterday I wasn't doing so well.

TS: What happened yesterday? Oh, you're in L.A. right now, right?

MH: Oh, yes.

TS: The baseball game, and dealing with the traffic, and all that fun stuff?

MH: Yeah, it's the latter. I have a new definition for "apocalyptic" now—it's Los Angeles traffic.

TS: Yeah, I don't know how you people in L.A.—or anywhere that has traffic—survives, because... I don't know.

MH: God have mercy on their poor souls. [laughs]

TS: I take it back, Mike. I *do* know how they do it, because they listen to this podcast during their drives, [MH laughs] so they're able to get a full episode in while they commute. That's how they survive.

MH: Yeah, there you go. They could almost get a week in... Oh, boy, it's awful.

TS: It is awful. I feel for y'all. But Mike, real quick: live streaming. Go get it if you haven't. I want to make it crystal-clear that you do not have to catch the conference live; you're going to be able to watch it and replay it at will on demand for two weeks after the event. So go sign up at NakedBibleConference.com. Help support the Naked Bible. This is one way to do that. We plan to do this every year. This is our inaugural—first one—so we're excited about that. It's fast approaching, Mike. It's next week. We're in the final stretch of preparations to get it all done, and we're looking forward to it.

MH: I actually was able to get my presentation together at an airport, so it was wonderful to have uninterrupted time.

TS: Hopefully the other scholars have gotten their presentations ready to go.

MH: Yeah, I can't possibly be ahead of everybody, but miracles do happen, I guess, occasionally. [laughter] That's why they're miracles.

Well, let's jump into Colossians 1:21, and as Trey said, through 2:5. There are a number of things in here. There's only one big "let's-camp-here-for-a-while" kind of item that I'm going to hit on today. But there are several things that are going to take people's minds (especially if you're a dedicated listener to the podcast) back to things that we've commented on in other episodes, and even in other series that we've done. And of course that's fine; it's fair game. We're going through Colossians, and if these things are worth bringing up again (and I think the ones that I will bring up today are), then by all means, let's do that. So I'm going to read verses 21-23, just to get us kicked off here, and point out a few things. So Paul writes to the Colossians:

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.

This is right on the heels of his earlier comments, which we talked about last week. In verse 20 (we parked on that for a while) God through Christ was reconciling to himself all things, whether in earth or in heaven, so on and so forth. So he goes back to the theme of reconciliation. First, he says you're part of this reconciliation thing. You were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, and he has now reconciled in his body of flesh... So the first term to camp on here is "alienated." And there's an interesting parallel to this term (or at least this concatenation of terms or this little clustering—this content cluster) in the

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book of Ephesians. Remember, I've said before that Colossians and Ephesians are twin epistles. And so you'll often see something thematically being discussed in one that is discussed in the other, and this is one of those cases. So Paul comments in verse 21. He refers to the Colossians as those who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds. So they're estranged from God or estranged from Christ. If you look at the same content cluster in Ephesians, this is what you read. This is Ephesians 2:11-12. Paul writes this:

¹¹ Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision...

In other words, the Jews. The Jews are the ones who are circumcised. They're calling the Gentiles the “uncircumcision”—“the uncircumcision camp.” You're outside of God's family.

¹¹ Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Now, I'm going to read verse 12 again. He says, “Remember, you Gentiles, you who were the uncircumcision here... You Gentiles:

...you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise...

That suggests really strongly... This isn't the only time Paul's done it; it's not the only time we've talked about it. This suggests very strongly that the Church, the Body of Christ, *is* to be equated with the commonwealth of Israel in some spiritual sense. It's not physical; it's not ethnic. Just think about what you just heard me read from Paul in two different places. Separation from Christ—not in Christ—is defined by these terms: You're alienated from the commonwealth of *Israel*. To be separated from Christ, to be not part of the Body of Christ, is to be alienated from the commonwealth of *Israel*, to be estranged from the *covenants of promise*. Covenants were given to Israel. It's having no hope; it's being without God.

Now, if you flip that on its head, therefore, to be in Christ means the opposite of all those things. It means to be a member of the commonwealth of Israel. It means to be included in the covenants of promise. It means to have hope, and it means to have God. Think about that. Again, I know we have listeners that are not used to this kind of verbiage. Oh well. [laughs] This is the Bible. This is the

New Testament. The New Testament, in several places, creates a strong link between the Body of Christ and this thing called Israel. And it's not ethnic, because these are *Gentiles*. They are by definition not ethnic Israelites. Nevertheless, if they believe in Christ, they are members of "the commonwealth of Israel" and they are participants in the covenants given to Israel. You can go to Galatians 3 and read that, too.

So on one hand, we need to dispense (this is going to sound repetitive for regular listeners to the podcast) with this idea that Israel and the Church are firmly distinct and separable items. They are not. They are in some way related. They—in some way—overlap. Theologically, they overlap. To speak of the Body of Christ here in just plain, blunt language is to speak of the commonwealth of Israel in some sense. Now if you're from a dispensational tradition, you have been taught the exact opposite. You have been taught that Israel and the Church are firmly distinct in every way. That just isn't correct.

10:00 Now, the question is, when you get into this whole Replacement Theology stuff (and we've spent a decent amount of time on this on the podcast)... I'm going to go back to what I said before. In some sense, the Church has replaced Israel as the commonwealth/family of God, because you have this merging going on. They overlap. They are sort of smashed together in some way. But that doesn't mean that the New Testament doesn't speak, especially in terms of eschatological salvation... It doesn't mean that the New Testament never speaks of ethnic Israel in an eschatological sense—putting ethnic Israel, national Israel, into the promise plan of God in an eschatological sense. Because it does that, too. It does that, too. So if you're firmly in the replacement theology camp, you need to dispense with that notion—your notion—as well, that there is no New Testament talk of an eschatological promise plan (salvation plan, however you want to word that) for national Israel. There is something going on there, too, just like there's something going on with this conflation of Israel and the Church. It just is that way. That's what the text says. The text affirms both of those things, which is why I don't like any of the eschatological systems, because what they do is they run with one and then dismiss the other. They just do that. And they look beautiful to their adherents, because those who typically promulgate the systems will either not inform their adherents of the places where their system doesn't conform to pretty plain language in the text, or those passages become "problem passages." Well, they're only a problem because you're running with one and trying to deny the other. That's why they're a problem. You're picking one string and running with it and leaving the other one on the ground. That's why they're a problem. Scripture affirms *both* of these concepts.

And so the issue is, what's the most coherent way, given the revelation we have (which we often wish was more)? What's the most coherent way of trying to pursue both threads? And good for you if you find material that helps you do that. My role here, when it comes to situations like eschatology (because eschatology is hopelessly hermeneutically-driven)... It's all about which question you ask

interpretively. Which interpretive question do you ask, and the framework in which you answer that question—that's eschatology in a nutshell. It's inherently hermeneutically-driven. It's inherently presupposition-driven. That's why there are so many systems. That's what we have to deal with. We don't get all of our questions answered in the text.

So the thing to *not* do at that point is, "Well, I like *this* set of verses, and I'm going to go with these and build a system on top of it, and I'm going to call the other ones problems." That's not what we should do. We should honor the fact that scripture affirms all of these sides, both of these propositions, and do the best we can. We try to answer the questions to the best of our own satisfaction. We keep thinking about it. And we honor someone else who's also trying to think about both sides. I'd like to be flippant here and say you can honor *less* those people who aren't acknowledging both sides [laughs], and part of me feels that way. I'm not recommending that you be rude to anybody, but I think what you owe that person (if you run into a person, whether they're in the dispensational camp or replacement theology camp, whatever camp they're in) is just to alert them to the fact that, "There's a lot to think about here. Some of the verses that you cite really do support what you're saying here, but then there are these other ones over here that seem to really clearly contradict what's going on over here, at least the way you're framing things." And you need to alert them to that so that you can study scripture. That's what we're supposed to do. I think, in many regards, that when it gets to issues like this we convey the impression that we have all the answers. Or we replace studying scripture with making people think that we have all those answers. Or we have to deny in our own hearts the questions that remain because we're somehow troubled by that, like we have to have everything buttoned down. We don't. The biblical writers didn't have everything buttoned down. They learned things from each other, for instance. And there are some questions that they just leave unanswered. That's just the way it is. So enjoy the situation and be warmed and filled. Study scripture and do the best you can. And honor people who are trying to do the same thing.

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Let's move on to the "reconciled" language here. So going back to verse 22, he has now reconciled you who were once alienated (over in Ephesians, "outside the commonwealth of Israel," because you weren't in Christ)... He's now reconciled you guys, you folks, in his body of flesh by his death. So we're reconciled by means of Christ's body and flesh by virtue of his death. So we're brought into a new status—one that reflects the original creation order, like we talked about in the last episode. That's really what reconciliation is about in the broadest sense. Things are brought full-circle. In other words, we're members of God's family again. That's the way things were originally, back in Eden.

Reconciliation... We have to have a bigger view of it. We have to widen our horizons a bit. So we're brought into a new status by embracing the gospel. It reflects the original creation order. The original creation order has been restored, at least with respect to us, because we're in the family of God as God wanted it

to be from the beginning. It's what he desired at the beginning of creation. All of this is brought about by being united to him in his death. And then elsewhere, Paul's going to write about how we're united to his resurrection.

What's the point? Well, the point is that none of that is achieved by our own efforts or goodness. Our works are not needed to supplement inclusion in Christ's body. What I'm getting at here is if you think about a concept like reconciliation (as big as it really is) like resetting creation order, it just feels ridiculous to think that your little pile of good works over here somehow is capable of that sort of outcome magnitude. Really? Really, because you go to church, you tithe, you're baptized... Whatever it is. You fill in the blank with all the things that you think make God love you or something. "Just because I didn't do this or I did do that, that I'm helping reset creation order." Really? I think that's a bit inflated. I think there's an ego problem there. And ultimately, if you are lost in a performance-oriented way of approaching God, you *do* have an ego problem. You really do. It's difficult for you to surrender to the specific point of knowledge that you have salvation—you have everlasting life—because you're doing something as simple as believing that God will give that to you. It's not because of anything you've done, but because of what someone else did for you, and there are some people that just struggle with that. But that's the reality of it. That's the scriptural reality of it. It's because of what Jesus did, not because of what *you do*. So check the ego, because when you think about reconciliation here, the bigness of these concepts extend well beyond your four walls—what happens in your house. It's just so much bigger than that, and for you to think your works produced that kind of result is just nonsense. So hopefully that helps, because I know a *lot* of people struggle with this.

Now, look at what he follows this with. Let's go back to verse 21:

**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...**

You're going to be *presented* holy and blameless. You don't *achieve* it; you're *presented* that way, because of what somebody else did. Verse 23:

**²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the
hope of the gospel that you heard...**

Here we are, back to our series in Hebrews. I said it many times. I'm sure it was unpopular with some, but *you must believe to have eternal life*. I don't care if you prayed a prayer somewhere in the distant past. You don't get to pray a prayer and then in your heart of hearts reject the gospel and say "I don't believe it anymore; it's nonsense; it's garbage; it's crap." You don't get to do that. We don't

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have... I used the Old Testament illustration: We don't have Baal worshippers in heaven because they once aligned themselves with the God of Israel, they did public things, they went to festivals, blah blah blah blah. And then all of a sudden, they turn to Baal. They adopt Baal as their god. Well, I'm sorry; there are no Baal worshippers in heaven. That wasn't acceptable to God in the Old Testament because salvation is about *believing loyalty*. You align yourself with one God, and no other. And since Christ is God in the flesh and he came and accomplished what was necessary in God's plan—Yahweh's plan—for your salvation, if you align yourself with any other god or abandon Yahweh in the flesh (i.e., Jesus) and what he did on the cross for you... If you abandon that, you are *not* going to have everlasting life. To quote Paul, you must *continue* in the faith, not shifting from the hope of the gospel. And the form here about not shifting, it's passive—not being moved away by something, away from the gospel.

You say, "What about eternal security, Mike? You're denying eternal security!" No, I'm getting you to think about eternal security properly. If you believe the gospel, you are eternally secure. If you don't believe the gospel, you're not. You must believe. Hebrews says it in three or four places, this idea about continuing in the faith. It's not that you believe and then add works. The text doesn't say that. It says "continue in the faith." Keep believing. Don't shift away. Don't be shifted away. Don't be removed from the gospel. You must believe. It doesn't mean you never have a question. Doesn't mean you never doubt. What it means is that your believing loyalty stays at the same place. You're going to have doubts; you're going to have problems; you're going to have struggles. Everybody does. The apostles did! For goodness sake, Peter denied Jesus three times! But at the end of the day, where's Peter's heart? We know exactly where Peter's heart is. He was a believer. We persevere in the faith. We keep believing. You don't have the option of treating the gospel like an incantation, like it's a spell. "I prayed these words and now I'm just going to have any god I want. I don't believe this stuff anymore, but boy, I'm glad I used that spell back when I was 15 years old. The spell's going to get me in." No, it's not. Faith in the gospel is what God requires for salvation. If you have that—if you believe the gospel—you are eternally secure. Your future is secure. You *will* have everlasting life; you *will* be a member of God's family. If you do not believe the gospel, you don't. This is a hard message for a lot of evangelicalism, but it's the text. What can we say here?

N.T. Wright has something to add here on verse 23 here. What follows (this "continuing in the faith" thing) is kind of interesting. I want to read what he says here, because I'm going to like it a lot, and I'm going to not like it a little. [laughs] So I'll read verse 23 again. Paul says you're going to be presented holy and blameless before God,

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.

Now, how in the world can Paul say that? Well, if the gospel's been proclaimed to every place under heaven, Paul, why are you doing what you're doing? You'd be out of a job. Now, N.T. Wright writes this. He quotes Colossians 1:23 and he says here:

Having narrowed his horizons from the world as a whole to the church in Colosse, Paul broadens them again, to show the young church once more where it fits into the divine plan. *This is the gospel that you heard*, he writes, *and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven*. Referring again to 1:3–8, he claims that the Colossian church, in hearing the gospel, has joined an audience that includes every creature on the earth...

And he says it's an echo of Colossians 1:6, which I'll just read:

...the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing...

And then Colossians 1:16. That's the:

...by him all things were created in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, rulers, authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

So there's some connection to Jesus in, like, everything else in the world. He narrowed it, and now he's broadening it in this huge way. And back to Wright, he says:

This is an extraordinary statement.

Yeah, it is!

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Whenever we date this letter, Paul knew perfectly well when writing it that the vast majority of people in the known world of his day had not even heard the name of Jesus. What, then, did he mean?

We appear to be faced with three possible answers. (a) Either Paul is referring to a proclamation of the gospel which takes place in and through a revelation in the world of created 'nature' itself: or (b) he could be thinking of a single proclamation of the gospel (in the sense of an announcement of Christ's Lordship)

which, made in advance of its verbal declaration to human beings, was somehow made known to the other orders of creation: or (c) he intended this claim to be taken in an anticipatory sense; that, in Christ himself and in the fact of the Gentile mission, the gospel had *in principle* already been preached world-wide.

So those are Wright's three trajectories for explanation.

The first two interpretations seem unlikely. Even if Paul did believe in a revelation of God the Father in the world of nature (some have denied this, but it seems clear enough in Rom. 1:19ff., not to mention Acts 14:17; 17:24ff.), he never suggests that the gospel itself, the good news about Jesus Christ, has been made known in this way. [MH: I would agree with Wright there.] Nor does the idea of an independent proclamation to the non-human creation find any echoes elsewhere in his writings. Nor would it be clear how he, Paul, could become a minister of such a proclamation, as he says in the next phrase.

And now Wright does something interesting: he brings up Romans 10:18.
[laughs]

Romans 10:18, though sometimes read in this way, refers in context to Paul's own Gentile mission, seen from God's point of view as a single world-wide proclamation.

I think that's *highly* doubtful—his take on Romans 10:18 there. Let me just finish Wright before I go back to that.

All of this strengthens the view that the third answer is correct. The aorist tense should strictly speaking be translated not 'that has been preached' but 'that was preached'.

So let's go back to the verse and just read it that way. That's a good point about the aorist. So:

...this gospel that you heard which *was proclaimed* in all creation under heaven.

To me, that actually supports my own take on Romans 10:18; again, we'll get back to that in a moment. But what Wright is saying... He thinks that "was preached" is better.

The verb *kēryssein*, one of Paul's regular words for his own activity (as in the next clause), supports the idea of a proclamation made to human beings rather than the notion of an instantaneous announcement made directly to the non-human

orders of creation. God has, in principle, announced the gospel to every creature under heaven. Although, however, the proclamation is made to human beings, we would be quite wrong, in view of 1:16, 18 and 20, and the emphatic reiteration of ‘everything’ there and elsewhere in Colossians, to limit its *effects* to [just humans].

That’s the end of the Wright quote. Now, I think it’s really interesting that Wright has this discussion here about the gospel that was preached (I’ll use Wright’s preferred translation: “the gospel *was preached*—was proclaimed in all creation under heaven)... that he would opt for his third potential solution and not take a little more thought onto the second one. The second one was that a single proclamation of the gospel in the sense (this is Wright’s wording) of an announcement of Christ’s lordship made in advance of its verbal declaration—the actual story that people are going to go out and tell other people later. I think that’s actually a better approach here *because* of Romans 10:18.

Now Romans 10:18... I’ll just read that. Paul is talking about, “How shall people hear unless they have a preacher...” And, “Have they not heard?” Paul’s stressing out about people hearing the gospel. And he goes through all this, “We’ve got to send people. You’ve got to have preachers. You’ve got to get out there and do this. How are people going to hear except we go out to them?” And then he asks in verse 18:

¹⁸ **But I ask, have they not heard?**

And you expect him to say, “Well, of course they haven’t heard.” That’s why you’re stressed out, Paul. But he says:

**Indeed they have, for
“Their voice has gone out to all the earth,
and their words to the ends of the world.”**

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He’s quoting the Septuagint there. If you use the Masoretic text, it’s “their line has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.” What’s he quoting? If you go back to... I don’t know what episode it is. It’s the one we did around Christmas time—the date of the birth of Jesus. He’s quoting Psalm 19:4, which is not restricted to the area of Paul’s ministry, which is my big gripe with where Wright lands here. I don’t think it makes any sense. In Psalm 19:4, he’s talking about the celestial objects in the heavens.

**The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.**

² **Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.**

**³There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.**

**⁴Their voice [or “their line” with the Masoretic Text] goes out through all the
earth,
and their words to the end of the world.**

It’s comprehensive. And there’s lots of verbs of communication there going on. But he’s talking about these celestial objects that everyone sees. Everybody sees the sky during the day and the nighttime. So that is actually a better way to approach this. And I start a lot of my discussions about taking Revelation 12 as what would have been known in antiquity—something like astral prophecy or apocalyptic stuff that has to do with the celestial objects that... I can’t prove it, but I suspect that Paul was referring to celestial stuff at the time of the birth of Jesus for this, because to use Wright’s words, if that’s the case, then that is a “universal proclamation of Christ’s lordship.” The divine king has come. It’s not the full gospel; I’m not with Bollinger here; I’m not with Seiss or D. James Kennedy, that you can read the whole gospel story in the stars and the zodiac and all that. I’m not there. I don’t believe that.

What I do believe is what I just said: that the celestial objects (astronomy, astrology, whatever word you want to use here)... There was a good astrology in antiquity because Jews had this idea that since God made the celestial objects and he made them for times and seasons, that we could observe these things and we could sort of know... We could get messaging from them (Psalm 19 and lots of other verses... I’m actually working on a book on this). There’s lots of this stuff going on in scripture. But it’s not this “full gospel in the stars” message. I think it is (and I like the way Wright puts it even though he doesn’t land there) a declaration of lordship, which I would articulate this way: that the divine king has come. You could know this as a Jew. You could know this as a Gentile, *if* you take Revelation 12 for exactly what it says: astronomical signage associated with the birth of Jesus in that chapter. If you do that, that produces certain things astronomically that allow you to understand that both Jew and Gentile would have seen certain things and assigned meaning to them—namely, the birth of a divine king.

So I’m not going to drift off back into that earlier episode. But this statement in Colossians 1... I think the best way to understand this idea of the gospel which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven... I think the reason Paul can say stuff like that is the whole Revelation 12 kind of matrix/complex of ideas. I can’t prove that that’s what was floating around in Paul’s head, but if it was, this kind of statement has a coherent explanation and makes good sense in a number of ways theologically and helps us make sense of some other passages.

So I'm not going to drift into that earlier episode (you can look up the earlier episode), but I just thought it was really interesting because you read that and you go, "What in the world?" You'd ask the question that Wright asks at the beginning of his little section. Paul has to know that most of the known world never even heard of Jesus. What in the world are they talking about? I think he actually answers that question for us, at least partially, even though he doesn't really (in my judgment) land in the right place. Now, let's continue. We'll go back to Colossians 1:24-29. I'm going to read the rest of the chapter. It says:

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 [holy ones].

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I'm going to put "holy ones" in here again, because if you listened to prior episodes, I just can't stand the translation, "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.

I want to draw attention to the line, "I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church." Wright has a nice little section on this. Wright writes this:

How can there be anything lacking in the sufferings of Christ?

That's the obvious question!

...It is in this sense that Paul can speak of filling up the afflictions of the Messiah. He is not adding to the achievement of Calvary. The word 'afflictions' (*thlipsis* in the Greek) is never, in fact, used of the cross. [MH: which is an interesting observation.] He is merely putting into practice the principle of which Calvary was, in one sense, the supreme outworking. He understands the vocation of the church as being to suffer; he does not arrogate this privilege to himself, as though he were independent of Christ, but rightly sees that it is his precisely because it is Christ's, and so is he. This is what he means when he writes of suffering 'with Christ' (Rom. 8:17) or of sharing the fellowship of Christ's sufferings (Phil. 3:10).

Now, I would add, verse 25 confirms that. He says:

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...

He's not adding to the gospel. Paul's not claiming that his efforts add to the sufferings of Christ or do anything like that. It's just that what happened with Jesus on the cross, that (to use this terminology) had a destiny. That was going to have a ripple effect and it was going to involve a lot of suffering, just as Jesus suffered, to tell people about that thing—to reveal the mystery, which he's going to bring up in the very next verse. And that's what Paul's saying here. He shares in that outcome, in that sense. He doesn't share in the deliverance—in the thing that produces the outcome. He shares in the outcome of it. He brings up "mystery." We read the rest of chapter 1, and he mentions mystery in verse 26. I'll read it again. All this is:

⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his [holy ones].

The *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* has a nice little comment here. It's kind of interesting.

Mystērion [mystery] appears twenty-one times in Paul's letters out of a total of twenty-seven NT occurrences. [MH: So overwhelmingly, it's Pauline.] Usually it points not to some future event hidden in God's plan, but to his decisive action in Christ here and now...

It actually refers to the past and the present, not really to the future. It's just kind of an interesting observation and it's an interesting term for that. Here are some of the passages that mention *mystery*.

1 Corinthians 2:7-8:

⁷ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

This idea of this secret and hidden wisdom... It's referring to the gospel, which is the mystery. It's something that the hostile supernatural powers didn't know. They didn't understand it. If they did, they would never have crucified Jesus. I talked about this in *Unseen Realm*. Now *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* comments in this regard, so that you know that this just isn't Mike's take on the

passage. I'm well in the mainstream here with that whole idea, that the gospel itself (the elements of the gospel, what the plan actually was, how it was going to work) was cryptic. Now the DPL, Peter O'Brien, writes this:

The mystery which focuses on salvation through the cross of Jesus Christ is not new, for God had decreed it "before the ages" (1 Cor 2:7; see Election and Predestination). It has been kept hidden from "the rulers of this world" (1 Cor 2:8; see Principalities and Powers).

In other words, God came up with the plan before the foundation of the world, but it was kept hidden from the rulers of this world.

...Only ignorance of the mystery can explain their crucifixion of "the Lord of glory." But now [on the other side of it] the mystery of God's salvific plan, which includes the divine inheritance, is being revealed through his Spirit.

Romans 16:25-26 says this:

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²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith...

Even the disciples... The disciples could read the Old Testament, and they couldn't figure this out. The reference there to the mystery being... In the text, in the Old Testament, the prophetic writings... It goes back again... If you've read *Unseen Realm*, this is all familiar, and I apologize a little bit for it. But for those who haven't, yes, all of the elements of the plan of salvation are in the Old Testament scriptures, but they're not connected. The data points are left unconnected. It's fragmentary intentionally. It's intentionally that the picture—the mosaic—is intentionally obscured by virtue of the scattering of the pieces. But it's all there, and in hindsight they could look—and they did look—and understand. But before you had the cross, none of that was clear. After you had the cross, now you can see how things fit together, how it all came together. Romans 11:25... This is Paul speaking to Jews.

²⁵ Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

There's a good reference to ethnic Israel. And Paul follows this by saying, "And in this, all Israel will be saved." So there's some connection here between the

Gentiles being grafted in, and Paul says, “That was a mystery, that the Gentiles would become full heirs,” and all this kind of stuff. But that has some role to play in the future of all Israel being saved, which must include in some way ethnic Israel, even though ethnic Israel as a body of believers—as the family of God... Because a lot of ethnic Israelites were not in the family of God at the end of the day in the Old Testament; they went off and worshipped Baal. The fact that you were an Israelite didn’t mean salvation. You had to *believe*. It’s the same thing across the Testaments. So you can’t conflate ethnic Israel with the family of God, either. It’s just a flaw in thought when people do that, for whatever reason. Usually they do it to argue for or against some view of eschatology. But it doesn’t even work in the Old Testament.

But Paul is connecting these things. Even though you have this conflation of the body of Christ with the people who are really in the family of God, and that included the commonwealth of Israel... They’re all part of the picture, but on either side of it, you have to believe. You can’t go worship Baal; you can’t have any other god. You have to put your faith in Yahweh and his promises. You have to put your faith in Christ and his promises, and Christ *is* Yahweh in the flesh. All these things are important. They’re all part of the whole picture. Paul conflates those things, but yet they all have individual aspects and individual roles, as well. So you just have to come to grips with that.

The mystery is Christ’s role in the salvation of humanity.

45:00 This is DPL again. He has to reset everything. He is the figure that causes the resetting (the return, the coming full circle) of creation the way God intended it to be. What did God intend? He wanted a human family, rightly related to him. The only way that that’s going to happen after it’s just been blown to bits is Jesus and what happens on the cross. That’s why Paul can speak of reconciliation as this grand, cosmic, super-structural resetting—restoring—of creation in the broadest sense. And again, you can’t have... The incarnation is important because those moral agents that sinned—the ones that actually get offered redemption—are the ones that Jesus became like. He entered their reality, and that’s human beings. We talked about this last time, with the whole question of, “Can Satan be redeemed, the fallen angels, and all that stuff?” Hebrews 2 actually specifically denies that; it’s about humanity. But nevertheless, all things are going to be restored to the original creation order in the way God wanted things to be. But the objects of redemption in terms of “you need to exercise faith now, you need to believe, you have the capacity to make this *decision*,”—those agents are people. Hebrews 2 specifically denies the other side. So you can revisit that episode, as well.

Now, that’s the end of Colossians 1, and we’ll just throw in Colossians 2, the first five verses here, because they essentially are repetition of this, but I want to get

up through verse 5 for the sake of the next episode. Paul writes this in Colossians 2:

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, ²that 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...

There's the reference to *mystery* in Colossians 2:2.

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

Wisdom... that's a key concept to take back to 1 Corinthians 2, that had the rulers of this world known, they would not have done what they did. So that's a link back to what Paul says in that passage, again.

⁴I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. ⁵For 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.

Now, there's one thing I want to camp on a little bit here. You've got this statement in Colossians 2. He brings up the mystery and the wisdom and knowledge that are part of the mystery and all this sort of stuff, and then he mentions that he doesn't want anybody to delude the Colossians with "plausible arguments." He doesn't want them to be *removed* (go back to the end of Colossians 1) from the faith, because he's just told them, "You have to keep believing. You need to *continue* in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting, not being removed." It's a passive—"not being removed from the hope of the gospel that you heard."

So you take that concern and you look at chapter 2 in light of that concern, and it's kind of interesting. It creates this situation to ask... It would have been nice for Paul to be a little more specific here, because he's got something on his mind here that concerns some subject matter that he believes *might* be used against the Gentiles to move them away from faith. That raises the question, "What might that be?" It concerns the mystery, and the mystery had something to do with wisdom and knowledge about Jesus—specifically wisdom and knowledge that the rulers of this world didn't know, hence they went through with the crucifixion. They instigated that among the people to get Jesus killed. So it's really interesting because you could think, "What would somebody say in relation to all of these pieces—all of these topic pieces? What would someone say to a Gentile that might damage them, that might get them to misperceive the gospel?"

Perhaps, maybe come to the conclusion that, “Well, we’re really not included in this because we’re Gentile.” What would do that?

I want to take you to a couple of other passages just to get you thinking about those content items: the mystery, the wisdom, the knowledge, the rulers, the authorities, the principalities, the powers who don’t know what they need to know and they go through with the crucifixion. And Paul says, “Boy, had they known, they would have never done this.” All of that. And think about all of those things in relationship to this concern that Paul has that, through plausible arguments, the Gentiles might be moved away from the faith. Just hold on to that, and I’m going to read to you Ephesians 1:7-10. Paul writes:

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

That sounds like Colossians 1:20. But then you move to Ephesians 3 and there’s a little bit more specificity. I’m going to read what I think is probably the clearest statement of the mystery and this issue, involving the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. Ephesians 3:1-10:

**For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of 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 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.**

Let me stop there. It’s a clear statement that you could go read stuff but you wouldn’t know. The people in prior generations just couldn’t figure this out, but now—to us—we understand it because of the Spirit. And because it’s *now*; it’s not then. It’s *after* the cross; it’s not before.

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. ⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints [holy ones], this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the

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plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, ¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

See, now our opposition (and you could even throw in the good guys, too), now they understand what the mystery was. Everybody can understand it now. But the question is, why single the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places out in verse 10? Why single them out? I would say it's because their rebellion contributed to the mess that needed to be fixed. And they're the ones that got duped in 1 Corinthians 2. DPL tracks on this as well. It's not just Mike. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*:

In Ephesians 5:32 the "mystery" points to the union of Christ and the church, the meaning of which (perhaps like Gen 2:24) is hidden.

The situation of "perceived demonic hostility in western Asia Minor may have provided a partial motivation" for Paul's emphasis on the cosmic aspect of the mystery in Ephesians [MH: Both in that chapter, and of course, earlier in the chapter that we just read.] (Arnold). It could have stood in deliberate contrast to the Lydian-Phrygian "mysteries," which were so popular, so as to be a polemic against the possible influence of these mysteries in the churches. According to [the Greek Magical Papyri] PGM I.128–32 a pagan mystery initiation involved receiving "the lord of the air" [MH: which sounds suspiciously like Ephesians 2:2, "the prince of the power of the air"] (cf. Eph 2:2) as the indwelling deity!

So what DPL is saying... In Ephesians (and Ephesians and Colossians are these twin epistles), there's something going on in the background here about demonic entities and this "lord of the air." There's something going on with them and the mystery concept in the false religion of those places. That might be why Paul includes them in what he says to the Ephesians and to the Colossians. Paul wants them to know, "Look, you pagans have been taught that the powers you've been worshipping just know everything. They just know what they're doing. They're lords of the air, and they have understanding of all mysteries. They don't know squat. They didn't. They got duped. They got hoodwinked. God pulled one over on them, because the real mystery was uniting you, nullifying the power of the rulers and authorities that are over you because of the Deuteronomy 32 worldview (all that stuff again) delegitimizing their grasp—their hold on you, their power, their authority on you—which was legitimate. God at one time punished you with the situation back at Babel. He divorced the nations. We all know that. You guys have the same worldview in your own writers." (*Unseen Realm*... We've had conversations on the podcast about this before.) "You guys all know this, and you might think... Here's the key: you Gentiles might think that 'we should obey the powers over us, because, maybe they're not so smart, maybe they got hoodwinked by the Most High, but the Most High put them over us, and

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so we just feel kind of creeped out or uncertain that we should forsake them and move over to this Jesus.” And see, that’s Paul’s argument. You’re not only allowed to do that by the same Most High who gave the rulers and authorities that you’ve been worshipping... He gave them their status and their authority and they went nuts with it and became corrupt and all that... You’re not only *allowed* to do that by the same Most High who created that situation in judgment back at Babel, but that Most High became a man, and that man died for you on the cross, and I am here to tell you that story. So you’re not only *allowed* to do this, he *demand*s that you do this. He wants you do this. Oh, he’s hoping so much that you do this, that you believe, that you are now members... You can be members of the commonwealth of Israel! In other words, you can be included back in the family of God, the way God originally intended things to be.

Now, I can’t prove it, but with all of that backdrop, when Paul in Colossians 2:4 is worried about somebody deluding them with “plausible arguments,” I’m willing to bet that in the back of Paul’s mind he was concerned about this because... Here’s how you could argue it. Remember Colossians is all about worshipping angels and other entities and Jewish mysticism stuff? Okay, he has Jewish opponents and he also has this Gentile problem. Here are my two points of speculation:

1. How would this information be used to delude Gentiles—to get Gentiles to not listen to Paul? What sort of persuasive argument could there be? You could argue it this way. Part of Jewish mysticism included the idea that the holy ones on earth (people of God) were the counterparts of the holy ones in heaven. That was common belief. Maybe the Jewish community used that part of Jewish mysticism as a basis to argue that it was inappropriate for Gentiles to be part of the people of God. Might that work? Maybe. I think it *could* work on some people.
2. Secondly, Jews also could have argued that Gentiles had their own gods by decision of the Most High, and therefore ought not to have inclusion in the people of God just in principle. Now, granted, they’d have to ignore certain Old Testament passages like Isaiah 66 for that. It’s hard to argue against full Gentile inclusion when the passage is calling Gentiles “priests of Yahweh,” but they could ignore that.

But somewhere in these two speculations that I’m offering here, I can see where a clever Jew who would understand the Deuteronomy 32 worldview and yet despise... He’d have to ignore the covenant with Abraham. He’d have to ignore Isaiah 66. I can see where a clever Jew could walk up to a Gentile and say things like, “You know, this Paul is kind of nutty. He claims to be a Jew. He claims to still be worshipping the God of Israel. We all know the God of Israel set up the situation: We worship him, and you worship these other gods, and that’s the way he wanted it. If you listen to what Paul’s saying, you’re going against the will of the Most High. And you might be concerned about either obeying him or obeying

your own gods because they know the situation, too, and you *should* be concerned. So you *shouldn't* listen to Paul. You should just let things be as they are.”

Now again, I can't prove that's what's going on, but there are some things here that are fairly suggestive of it. You take the data points and you put them together and you imagine what the conversations could be like. It wouldn't surprise me at all if you would have some clever Jews trying to convince Gentiles that, “You just don't belong here. And theologically, you're in jeopardy if you want to be with us. You just need to tune Paul out at that point.”

So just throwing that out as we finish up for the day. I think it's really interesting. You have these elements of Jewish mysticism that could include these ideas, and it's hard to say how the exact conversation could have gone. But I've mentioned before, in that pagan podcast I did, and how much material there was in the pagan worldview that mimics the Deuteronomy 32 worldview. They understood why they were worshipping this god and not that god—because the higher ups wanted it that way. And for them to step out of line... If you were a thoughtful pagan, you really took this seriously. That's going to trouble you. It's going to trouble you. You feel vulnerable to the whim of the gods at that point. So it could be part of the picture here.

TS: Alright, Mike, well, just a reminder, next weekend is the conference. We hope that everybody will join us via livestream if you can. And hopefully next week the podcast may or may not have Archie Wright on. If not, we'll certainly have chapter 2.

MH: Yep.

TS: Until then, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.