

CHRIST

IN YOU

THE HOPE OF GLORY

Colossians 1:27

A Theological

EXPOSITION

EBENEZER AHENKAN OWUSU

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(Colossians 1: 27):
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 Noyam

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DEDICATION

To the glory of God, I dedicate this book to all faithful Christians,
especially, members of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Unto you oh! God, my foremost gratitude for the things you have and doing in my life, thank you my LORD. I also appreciate my wife, Mama Lydia Ahenkan Owusu, Rev'ds. Daniel Nyarko Tieku, Ebenezer Kwasi Nartey and Samuel Amponsah for reading through the script to offer their constructive comments, I say God richly bless you.



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PREFACE

This is a systematic exposition of the letter Apostle Paul wrote to the members of the church in Colossae. Dealing with the Colossian heresy, Paul called their teachings as vain deceit based on human tradition which denied Christ's sufficiency and belittled the Christian hope in His finished work on the cross. People were stealing the hearts and mind of those who have believed to focus on worldly traditions. The book unveils some of the heretic comments and teachings in our day which are clouding our hope in the glory of God.

What is this Christian hope of glory? What must we do to keep hold of this glory? Many Christians have gone back to their old ways due to unanswered heretic questions posed against their faith in Christ. For these reasons and more, the book, *Christ in you, the hope of glory* welcomes you to journey through the entire book of Colossians to give hope to those in despair, not to give up but to hold fast that which is good – *quod bonum est tenete*.

Contextual theological discussion on the glory *chabod* takes us to understand the Ark of Covenant from the perspective of the Akans of Ghana's golden stool. The restoration of God's glory to the people in Christ, our Immanuel is clearly connected to bringing the African to understand God's work in our own culture.

The book brings out the central theme of the entire letter to the church in Colossae which was aimed to resist the heretic teachings and further bring clarity to the supremacy of Christ – the foundation of our faith. The book will bring you to a deeper understanding of *Christ in you, the hope of glory* as we grasp the truth on the sufficiency of Christ to bring all people to the expected glorification. Spend time with this book as it deepens your anchor in Christ Jesus and receive the truth of the Christian faith.

The message in the book is suitable for every Christian, especially those who have the earnest desire to comprehend the Christian faith as Christ gave us to grow deeper to stand against the flooding heretic messages flowing in our media circles today. The book answers questions that complicate the minds of children of the faith such as “Is the Christian God and that of Islam the same?”

Rev. Ebenezer Ahenkan Owusu
January, 2023



CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Brief Background on the Book of Colossians

The book of Colossians is one of the letters written from prison by Paul. The city of Colossae was a relatively small town in Phrygia, in the then Western Asia Minor (Turkey). It had close connections with two other cities, Laodicea (16 km to the west) and Hierapolis (26km northwest). They were both mentioned in the letter (2:1; 4:13, 15-16). The three cities were located in the valley of the Lycus about 161 Kilometers from Ephesus.

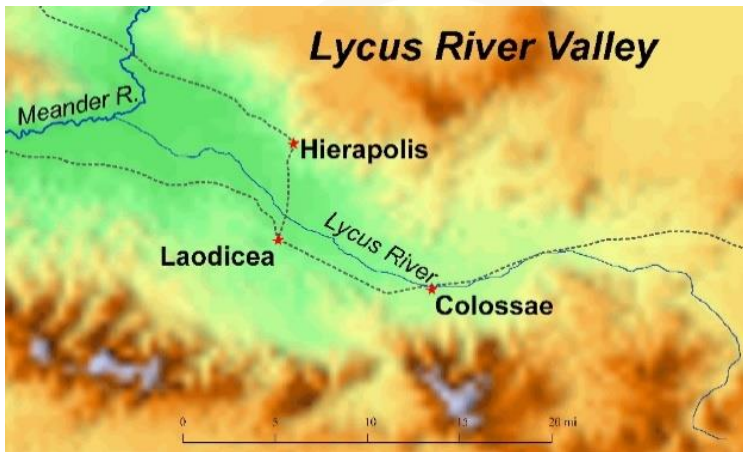


Fig. 1: The Map of Colossae

The place was then known for exotic spiritual pursuits with many pagan cults and mystery religions, including devotees to the mother goddess Cybele - a goddess of healing, and fertility. She was considered to be the protector in war (whose headquarters was in Hierapolis) and the worship of creations as a deity (sun, moon and stars) which might have been the reason for Paul's reference to "elemental spirits of the world" (2:8, 20). The

population of Colossae comprised a sizeable number of Hellenistic Jews (Jews integrated into gentile cultures).

It is believed that the church in Colossae was planted by Epaphras (1:7-8), an associate of Paul because the book of Acts indicates that Paul went to the region of Phrygia on both his second (Acts 16:6) and third (Acts 18:23, 19:1) missionary journeys; but made no mention of Colossae, Hierapolis or Laodicea. There is no indication of Paul winning souls or planting a church there. He gives the impression that the Christians in that area had not seen him face to face (2:1). It is to be understood that Epaphras was one of the disciples of Paul when the later went to Ephesus. At that time he was in Ephesus, where some were ready to listen to him. Others were, however, hostile and so he concentrated on those who believed. And made them his disciples, trained them at the hall of Tyrannus and allowed them also to practise ministry (Acts 19:9-10).

The letter to the Colossian church gives the understanding of a situation that is being addressed. The main purpose of the letter was to respond to some false teachings in the church. The Christians in Colossae were in danger of being deluded [deceived] with plausible arguments (2:4) and taken into captivity of “philosophy and empty deceit” away from Christ (2:8). Paul directed his message against certain people and their speculations that attempted to combine the practice of legalism, mysticism and asceticism (2:16,18) in the Christian community. The false teachers promised the Christians enjoyment of high spiritual life and a deep insight into the world of spirits (2:23), generating a type of worship that was completely different from the true Christian life.

The church again was cautioned on how the false teachings might appear to be – of spiritual superiority, but “they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” – dealing with the sinful nature of humans and the power to overcome sinful life (2:23). What was emerging was a mix of everything with Christianity, making Christ one of the many gods. These

false teachings have come to be known as the Colossian heresy or Colossian error.

This may have had its way into the church due to a clear lack of deep understanding of the position of Jesus Christ in the church, for that matter how Christianity is supposed to be coupled with ineffective nurture and discipleship culture. Epaphras, Paul's student (disciple) who was not well vexed in Greek and Jewish religions and philosophies had to consult Paul, an apostle with a multifaceted background to help him to correct these anomalies with the unadulterated Christian teachings.

In Colossians, Paul makes allusions to the supposed intermediate beings; 'aeons' or 'offshoot of deity' which was basically of the cosmos to the New Testament, as "thrones ... powers ... rulers ... authorities" (1:16), "powers and authorities" (2:15), and "angels" (2:18). These emanations were falsely deemed to constitute the fullness of God. Paul corrects them by teaching that, God's fullness dwells in Christ alone (1:19, 2:9) and so, Christ in the Christian is the living hope of glory.

Overview of the letter written to the church in Colossae

Teaching on the theme: *Christ in you, the hope of glory*, which I describe as the central theme of the book of Colossians, will require of us to have a general overview of the letter written to the church in Colossae. It begins with a salutation or greeting (1:1-2) from the writer. Paul the apostle gives thanks to God for their faith in Christ Jesus and their love for the Christians as well as the continuous growth of their love in the Spirit (1:3-8). The reasons for the thanksgiving to God for the church in Colossae are indicated as the fruit they were bearing for Christ. He asked that the church might be filled with and to grow in the knowledge of God (1:9-14).

The book discusses the pre-eminence of Christ Jesus as "the image of the invisible God," "the firstborn of all creation," "by Him, through Him and for Him all things were created" "in Him all things hold together" "He is the

head of the body, the church” and “the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.” Christ is the only one in whom “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”. Through Christ, God reconciles to Himself all things [creation] (1:15-20).

Paul, the writer, continues to teach on who Christ is and the works He has done – touching on the lives of the people, before coming into Christ and their life in Christ. He also dwells on their continuation in the faith, not shifting from “the hope of the Gospel”; to disqualify them from being presented to God as “holy and blameless and above reproach” (1:21-2:23). The central theme of the entire book is exposed, when the church in Colossae was assured of their perfection before God, as long as they continued in their faith in Christ. On this account, Paul suffered and toiled on behalf of the church, to make “known the mystery which is hidden for ages and generations, but now revealed to His saints: which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**” (1:24-27).

The Apostle warns them about deception with empty philosophy, that makes them feel their baptism into Christ is incomplete to warrant them a secured position with God; or that, strict observance of religious practices and rules will enable them to attain the fullness of their place in God’s Kingdom (2:1-23). These and others are condemned as only being “philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition and the elemental spirits of the world; and not according to Christ” (2:8,22).

The letter speaks about the ethical and moral implications as well as the status of those who have Christ in them (3:1-4:6). The church is exalted to focus on the heavenly Kingdom, to which they now belong, reject their past life practices and character and demonstrate the conduct that befits “God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, with compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another and ... forgiving each other” and to crown it all with love, “which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (3:1-17). The writer turns to give guidance to the Christians on how their household lives should be. He gives specific

household duties by spelling out the responsibilities of wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants, and masters (3:18-4:1).

Members of the church in Colossae are encouraged to devote themselves to continuous prayer and exhibit wisdom as they relate with others (those in the Christian faith and those outside of it). They are to pray for their leaders so that they will remain strong to teach, nurture and disciple them faithfully (4:2-6). Apostle Paul concludes with final greetings and some instructions to the church in Colossae. They include the reading of this letter to “the church of the Laodiceans” (4:7-17) and with final greetings with his own hand (4:18). With such Christological discourse of faith in God and love for fellow Christians, the focus, “Christ in you, the hope of glory”, is well presented.



CHAPTER TWO THE CHRISTIAN HOPE

The expectation or desire for a particularly good thing to happen in the future is described as hope. C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* says, “Hope is one of the Theological virtues.”¹ This means that it is a continual looking forward to Heaven. It is not a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. In history, you will find out that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most for the next generation.

Hope is not something that overlooks hurt, suffering or distress. Christian hope looks to the future not as a way to escape the present, but as a method to empower us toward a life of greatness and impartiality in our present life. According to Desmond Tutu, a South African Anglican Bishop and a theologian, “hope is being able to see that there is light, despite all of the darkness.”² This is embedded in what the Hebrew writer defines faith to be, “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1)

The Christian hope is seen in twofold; one, to the present world – that is the despair that sometimes the Christian faces in life and two, hope in the hereafter. Christians have hope in the Christ of eternity. Since Christ has been raised, Christians know that one day, we will inherit the glory that God has prepared for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament, God was the hope of both the nation and the individual. Throughout the exodus, God was their only hope, in times of

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. USA: HarperOne, 2015, nn,

² Desmond Tutu, https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/desmond_tutu_454129, Accessed on October 12, 2022.

hunger, thirst, leadership, war, diseases and even snake bites. The loving-kindness of God was revealed in repeated acts of His fidelity. That gave the people of God a guarantee or true hope that He would fulfil His promises even when they were in miserable situations. God gave this assurance, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” (Jer. 29:11). The three Hebrew men in Babylon declared, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” (Dan. 3:16-18). That was the level of hope the people demonstrated for God.

In the New Testament, hope is usually discussed in relation to faith and love. It is in the process of new life in Christ, which opens with faith in Christ Jesus, bound by love for the people of God and the final salvation experience into the glory of God. Karl Paul, a professor of Religion and Biblical Literature, explained that, hope emanates from faith and reflects the promise that what God has begun in Christ Jesus, will be fulfilled on the last day. This is to say, with faith the Christian has entrance to Heaven which is led by love and kept in focus by the hope of sharing in the glory of God.

The Apostle Paul talks on the subject of hope with the people of Colossae to preserve their absolute confidence and faith in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and the hope in the gospel message. He taught that our firm grip on this hope sets the Christian focused on continually growing in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. The preservation, reviving or reawakening of this hope, and the faith in the gospel of Christ Jesus had become necessary because false teachers had introduced teachings that had the potency of undermining the Christians’ confidence in the persona and significance of Christ, who is the subject of the Gospel. We believe that “with Jesus in the boat, we can smile at the storm”. No matter the darkness that befalls us, God will surely make a way – impotence, promise and fail, barrenness, poverty,

chronic diseases, joblessness and all others cannot overcome us, because of our hope in Jesus Christ, the solid rock on which we stand.

Precious one, you will agree with me that in every respectable activity or competition, it is for the goal we hope to achieve. A student goes through years of learning, school work, midnight studies, etc. only to be able to pass the examinations to merit a good certificate. On the contrary, when a student is made to understand that there is no way one can pass exams until the person pays for the questions, goes in with answers, and/or gets someone to teach him/her in the exams room, the hustle of mid-night learning, punctuality in class, and even respect for teachers get clouded. A false doctrine in the ears of the Christian is aimed at clouding his/her faith, making it unprofitable. Before we pursue any activity, we ask the question, "Is the reward worth the struggle?" If the reward is unrealistic, unachievable, or maybe worthless, then there is no wisdom in pursuing such a course.

The Colossian heresy was about the teachings of God and of salvation, which cast a cloud over the glory of Jesus Christ. Indeed, Christ's unique place as the sole redeemer and mediator between humanity and God had been significantly reduced in the false teaching that presents Christ as merely one of the emanations that filled the space between God and human beings (2:20-23).

As already emphasized, the false teaching recommended that people needed to relate to the spirits, the angels, the principalities, powers, thrones, rulers and authorities by worshipping them. This led to a host of teachings drawn from many religions, philosophies and human traditions (2:8) and they included doctrines about angels, festivals, the new moon, Sabbath, regulations about food and drink, rules about asceticism and severity to the body, and reliance on visions that go into so much detail (2:16-18). There were also prohibitions to keep, "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch", all in reverence to these elemental and intermediate spirits (2:20-21). People did not observe these just for the sake of them, but with the hope to reach

complete salvation to merit the glory of God since their salvation in Christ was deemed inadequate. This is synonymous with the exam scenario. The true worth of Christ must be revealed.

With this, Paul cautioned the believers to stay away from all these rules, insisting that, if indeed they died with Christ to these elemental spirits, they did not have to submit to such regulations (2:20). The “Written code” or “record of debt” (2:14) was a business term referring to a certificate of indebtedness in the debtor’s own handwriting. This was used to designate all the Mosaic Laws with all their regulations under which humanity is a debtor. Paul adds that Jesus took the “record of debt” away and nailed them to the cross signifying full atonement for the Christian. Again, “He [God] disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him [Christ]” (2:15). This unique place and work of Jesus Christ is what the Colossian heresy sought to undermine. Since it did not completely deny Christ, it became very dangerous, because it appeared as a Christian doctrine; yet, it reduced Christ’s significance and importance. The anticipated danger was that the young Christians might lose their Christian hope once their confidence in Christ was undermined. The hope of glory and eternal inheritance laid up for us in Heaven would come to naught, once Christ the guarantor of this hope loses His significance and importance as one who secures this hope.

The Christian hope is not baseless and it is not a simple wishful thought. It is founded on the fact that Jesus Christ is with us, within us and around us. He has pre-eminence over all things; walked on the sea, fed 5,000 men, healed the sick, calmed the storm, raised the dead and conquered death on the cross (resurrection) for us. He is with us and will bring us the final victory. “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him” (1 Jhn 5:14-15). No false teachings must come between us and our full hope in Christ Jesus.

The situation is no different from what we experience in our generation. On social media nowadays, we witness a number of people (celebrities, stars, bloggers, even pastors) casting clouds on the existence of the Christian hope in the Celestial City. We face many heretic comments on the internet [social media], which I refer to them as internet heresies. Many churches are coming up today with strong doctrines that undermine the place of Christ - the Sabbath teachings, food and meat, jewelry, dressing, covering the hair, baptism, etc. The letter to the Colossians which has the central theme of, *“Christ in you, the hope of glory”*, is apt and timely for today’s generation.



CHAPTER THREE THE GLORY [*CHABOD*] OF GOD

Let me walk you briefly through the historic relevance of the topic from Africa. The Asante Kingdom in Ghana holds in high esteem a symbolic monument called the “Golden Stool” see figure 2 below. The stool is believed to house the spirit and glory of the great Asante kingdom – for the living, dead and yet unborn. Many wars have been fought due to this stool which was miraculously commanded by Okomfo Anokye (a fetish priest) to descend on the lap of Otumfour Osei Tutu I, the first Asantehene. History has it that the stool is a seal of the covenant to the unity of the Asante Kingdom.

In 1900, when Sir Frederick Hodgson, the governor of the then Gold Coast demanded it, the Asantes fought so hard to protect and keep it. Many royals were taken into captivity, but the Asantes would guard this *golden stool* with the last drop of their blood. To the Asantes, the *golden stool* is their symbol of strength, soul, unity and glory of the kingdom.³



Figure. 2: The golden stool

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Stool, Accessed on November 23, 2022.

In Exodus 24, God brought Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel to the mountain, “and they saw the God of Israel... they beheld God, and ate and drank” (Exo. 24:10-11). God took Moses to the mountain to be with Him, and “the glory of the LORD [God’s presence] dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days” meanwhile, the Israelites saw that “the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain” (Exo. 24:17). After the people had seen the Shekinah glory in splendour, God made His will to live among His people in the fullness of this glory known, so He directed them to construct the Ark of Covenant. The Ark of Covenant is explained to be the symbolic presence of God in His full Glory “*chabod*” with His people.

The Ark of Covenant to the Israelites can be likened to the Golden Stool for the Asantes.

***Ichabod* - the Glory has departed**

In 1 Samuel, Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas who assisted him in the priestly duties were described as people who did not know the Lord and were found to abuse their office through greed and sexual immorality (1 Samuel 2:12-17,22). The story cannot be separated from the happenings in churches these days, which involve the abuse of office, sales of “anointing” items, misappropriation of funds, sexual immorality among church leadership etc. God was displeased with the acts and lives of the two juvenile priests as He is today with His people and the things that are ongoing.

The High Priest, Eli, is pictured to have been irresponsible towards his sons. It was obvious that he was genuinely concerned about the outcome of their behaviour, God’s anger, but that was not enough to have averted what the high priest feared most. Eli’s counsel to his sons was so apt and deep; Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad. If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him,

but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him? (1 Sam. 2:23-25).

This is the key question, *who can intercede for a man who sins against God?* The answer is in the incarnate Christ. In the letter to the Colossians, Apostle Paul gives the preeminence of Jesus the Christ to indicate Christ's qualification to fully intercede for humanity; "For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in Heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:15-20). Remember, the sins of the two young priests await God's anger.

Beloved in Christ, we have already established that the significance of the Ark of Covenant is the presence of God's glory with us. In a war against the Philistines, the Israelites said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies" (1 Sam. 4:3). They had sought to overpower their enemies with the presence of the Shekinah glory of God Almighty, meanwhile, due to sin, "the Ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died" (1 Sam.4:11). The Israelites lost the glory and soul of their kingdom, unlike the Akans who fought for the glory and soul of their kingdom.



Figure 3: The Ark of Covenant

The soul of the nation was crushed since the “glory of God” had been taken away by the enemies. When a messenger of the war brought the news of the death of Eli’s two sons and the capture of the Ark of Covenant, “Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died” (1 Sam. 4:18). At that time, the wife of Phinehas who was heavily pregnant painfully gave birth on hearing the news from the war and the death of her father-in-law. The woman attending to her said, “Do not be afraid, for you have borne a son.” But she did not answer or pay attention. And she named the child *Ichabod*, saying, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured” (1 Sam. 4:20-22).

Eli was explicit on the consequences of the actions of his two sons, which was death. God does not take pleasure in the death of a sinner; His desired will for us all is repentance. The Bible tells us, “For the wages of sin is death”. Meanwhile, God has made available to us “the free gift of God [which] is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly — but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:6,8). This free gift of God’s glory is for anyone who opens the door for Christ, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20). Precious one, receive Jesus today because, “to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (Jhn. 1:12-13).

Christ, the Revealing Glory of God

God always gives clues of His divine intervention, even in the Garden of Eden, that the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). From the Shiloh incident, God gave another clue to His intervention programme saying, “And I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind” (1 Sam. 2:35). In the book of Hebrews, Jesus is referred to as the “faithful high priest” and “a

high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 2:17, 6:20), Jesus Christ, our Immanuel – God with us (Isa. 7:14, Mat. 1:23) means the glory has come back to us.

John introduces Jesus as the Word, which was in the beginning with God “and the Word was God” the Creator, “without Him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3). Then God, who is “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The glory which was lost through sin in the Garden of Eden and later symbolized with the Ark of Covenant has now come to us in flesh; this is Jesus the Christ, the only Son of God.

When the people realized there was a vacuum created due to the *ichabod*, they called on Samuel to lead them.

And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, “If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” (1 Sam. 7:3)

The call is synonymous with that of the Apostle Paul, that coming to God through Christ Jesus, we have died to “elemental spirits of the world” (Col. 2:20). Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name *Ebenezer*; for he said, “Till now the LORD has helped us” (1 Samuel 7:12). In the message of salvation, we always see repentance and restitution at play. *Ichabod* was a sign of the departed glory of God from humanity; *Ebenezer* was a sign of God’s help extended to us and *Immanuel* is God’s total presence with us. Paul established this to say that, “God chose to make known ... the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Therefore, the *shekinah* glory which was lost is now restored to humanity as we receive Jesus Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit. So long as Christ lives in us, the hope of glory is assured.

The war to take away this glory from the Christian today is no more in physical battles as we read from the histories – the Israelites or the Asantes, but it is in the free broadcast of heretic contents – false teachings (Col. 2:8, 20-21) in our generation. There are several videos and audio propagating messages that undermine the core Christian faith, yet they are found in Christian settings. For instance, a Nigerian ‘pastor’ in his church preached to his congregation saying that there is no Heaven since God does not live in Heaven and quoted from the Bible (Gen. 1:1) to support his claims.⁴ A Ghanaian pastor spoke on social media condemning all those who preach about Heaven saying he has never seen Heaven but he has seen the earth and there is no way God will destroy this earth. A popular radio and television presenter threw a challenge to say, “There is no Heaven, any challenger?” Another preacher shed blood from his palm and showed it to the people and declared atonement for their sins by his blood. It is very common to hear some of these heretic comments even in sports commentaries, entertainment shows, news and politics. As Christians, we must guard the “glory of God” with all our might and strength in the fullness of the armour of God (Eph. 6:10-20).

In Colossians 1:15, we identify Jesus as the image of the invisible God (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4). Jesus is God in human form, the very person of God. This means Jesus Christ is the exact revelation and the representation (Heb. 1:3) of the one true God Almighty, whom no one has ever seen.

He is “the firstborn of all creation” – an indication of Jesus Christ’s preeminence and above all things. It must be explained that being the firstborn of creation does not mean that Christ is the first created being of all creation. However, it signifies priority, superiority, sovereignty and preeminence.

⁴ YouTube.com/GistFirstTV, Popular Nigerian pastor says there is no God in Heaven, Accessed on August 23, 2022.

Someone asked, “If God is invisible — cannot be seen physically – what does it mean then to say that the human Christ we experience with our physical senses is the God who cannot be seen? Beloved in Christ, this can be fully grasped if we would first assess these questions; i) Is God willing to be seen by humanity? ii) Is God able to do it? iii) Is it in the purpose of God? Therefore, the question is about God’s will, ability and purpose.

First of all, is God willing to be revealed to humanity? Yes (Exo. 25:9). In the Old Testament, God’s will to dwell among the people was seen when He asked the Israelites to build a tabernacle, a place where His presence dwelt among His people (cf. Gen. 35:7, 1 Sam. 3:21). God desired to show Himself to Moses, “But” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live” (Exodus 33:20). God showed Moses His back. Therefore, it is in the will of God to reveal Himself to humanity.

Again, God is omnipotent – all powerful, so God has the ability to do everything only which is consistent with His nature and purpose. That is why though He can do everything, yet, He cannot lie, because lying is inconsistent with His nature.

Therefore, to say that Christ is the revealed image of the invisible God to humanity is to say, that the invisible God who is willing to reveal Himself to humanity; and is able to do everything in His purpose, showed Himself to humans in Christ, for the purpose of the salvation of humanity (cf. John 8:58, 10:30, 14:9). Since God is invisible, if He was not willing, we (humanity) would not have been able to see Him. From all the discussions above, Jesus Christ is truly the image of the invisible God.

CHAPTER FOUR THE CHRISTIAN HOPE OF GLORY

The Christian hope of glory as we have discussed is about here and now as well as the age to come. What does it mean to have this glorious hope in us?

One, the hope of glory is basically about God's inspiring presence with us which assures us that all the good things which have been promised will surely be fulfilled. The Christian hopes in God's abundant supply of all our needs in His will and plans as He puts it, "Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 29:12-14).

Two, the hope of glory in the Christian qualifies us, "to share in the [Christ's] inheritance" (Col. 1:12). It is in Christ Jesus that God's glory is made available to us. It is in Him alone we are made "children of God", to be co-heirs of the Kingdom (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:17; Heb. 1:2).

Three, the hope of glory is also the guarantee of eternal life to the Christian. Christ being "the firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:18), means Jesus the Christ is the only one who was raised from the dead "never to die again; death no longer has dominion over Him" and with Him, by Him and in Him, we shall also be raised to the eternal glory of God (Rom. 6:8-9). The fulfilment of the promise, that, our corrupt and perishable bodies will be exchanged for the imperishable and the mortal shall put on immortality is rooted in Christ, who is in our hearts, the hope of glory.

Four, the hope of glory is in our presentation before God, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" as "holy and blameless and above reproach" (Col. 1:3, 22). It is the peace He made with His blood on the cross that reconciles us to our God defeating the accuser (cf. Col. 1:20; Rev. 12:10).

Five, the hope is rooted in our faith to see Christ face to face on the day of His appearance, realizing that we have also become like Him. We become like Christ in the new self we put on, as we are renewed in the knowledge of God's image (Col. 3:4, 10).

Six, Christ in the Christian, the hope of glory, means Christians are the bearers or carriers of hope to the society wherever we are. We “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” towards all people. In these times of global recession and hopelessness which have put many in despair, it behoves on us to inspire hope in our homes, workplaces, societies, markets, public places etc; that Jesus Christ is the answer to the problems (lost glory) of the world. We carry in us Christ, the glory of God, therefore we brighten gloomy lives. Elizabeth confessed, “For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.” (Lk. 1:44). Mary was carrying baby Jesus (the glory of God), and she influenced Elizabeth's baby, John, to leap for joy. In the same way, as carriers of the glory in our time, we must influence our environment to bring joy where there is sorrow, peace where there is war, love where there is hatred and so on. In other words, our Christianity is questionable if our presence does not radiate light and joy.

Living with all the Christ-undermining heretic comments, teachings, books, videos, audio podcasts, etc. the issue of how we do hold our faith in all these challenges, amidst the alternatives this dark world provides must be seriously tackled.

Paul's concern is, that Christians should not be moved into misleading doctrines but remain solidly in the faith and full hope in Christ Jesus (Col. 2:4). He says, “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” (Col. 1:23), that is when you can be presented as holy and blameless before God.

The Bible sets the Christian God in the right perspective when he says, “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you” (Col. 1:3). Prayer is directed to God, who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. If there is a god who is not the Father of Jesus, then that god cannot be equated to the Christian God. The Christian God is not the same as a general “god”. The Buddhists, Muslims, Hare Krishnas, Eckankars, Traditionalists and many other religionists and faith based organizations do have gods who are not the same as the Christian God, “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”. The names may be similar in languages but not the same as the God of the Christian. Any teaching that equates the Christian God to the ‘god’ of any other faith which does not believe in Jesus, the only Son of God as the only way to God, is false and heretic.

Christians’ hope of glory is in (i) their faith in Christ and (ii) their love for all the saints [Christians] (Col. 1:3-4). Many people in the church today, share experiences of how fellow Christians and church members have disappointed them in one way or the other, making it difficult to show love to the church and society again. We are encouraged to keep this fire of love burning, no matter the bad experiences because it is one of the pillars of the Christian faith. Is it difficult to employ a church member in your own firm? Is it difficult for you to connect, partner, or network with a fellow Christian in any way? Remember, your unceasing love for fellow Christian brethren is important to your faith, “because of the hope laid up for you in Heaven” (Col. 1:5).

There are other fundamental elements of the Christian life, that would cause us to remain firm and deep in the hope of the glory that faith yields for us. These elements are discussed as the developmental process of Christ in us.

The Elements of Christ in Our Hearts, the Hope of Glory

1. The right knowledge of God's will

“That you may be filled with the knowledge of His will to reach all the riches of the full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ.” (Col. 1:9, 2:2)

The right knowledge of God's will and His mystery, which is Christ Jesus fills us when we commit ourselves to the diligent study of Scripture, and to making time for only sound teachings of God. Your personal quiet times of devotion with the Lord – making time for a personal Bible study plan with the aid of good devotional materials, such as Daily Guide, Daily Power, Daily Super Food, Our Daily Bread, PCG Bible Study Material, Reflection from the Mount etc., family devotions, small group Bible study in church and other Bible study periods, are instrumental to be filled with the right knowledge.

As preachers and teachers of the Word, it is our responsibility to prepare adequately and teach sound doctrines. We have an example from Epaphras, who Paul referred to in Colossians 1:7, as, "Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf." Paul was so confident of the message Epaphras preached. He called it, "the word of the truth, the gospel" (1:5), and he reckoned that it afforded the believers the hope laid up for them in Heaven. Once again, we are emphasizing the need for sound teaching. Therefore, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

These days, sound doctrines that are based on the proper exposition of scriptures, are giving way to motivational and sensational messages, which do not help members actually to be filled with the right knowledge of God. It only incites people to engage in practicing what they do not understand, for instance; using canes to beat Satan, holding cutlasses in church services to

kill Satan, praying to provoke God, shooting at Satan, and so on. These are trending to catch up on almost everyone. We should not be in a hurry to inspire our members, or as some say, "give them vim" without first helping them to appreciate the meaning of scripture. When the foundation of our members is not secured with a deep understanding of God's will, they become easy prey to false teachers, prophets and pastors who come with heretic and deceptive teachings for their selfish gains. Inspirational messages are good, but they should not replace the proper exposition of scripture and sound doctrines. This was the preoccupation of the *ecclesia* (church) in the beginning, and ministers knew it was their main task, and they made time to study and teach sound doctrines that equipped their members with the ability to recognise and detect erroneous doctrines. I wonder whether it is still the case today.

Increasing in knowledge, all spiritual wisdom and understanding involve knowing and coming to terms with who Christ is, and the spiritual and heavenly treasures available in Him for us. They include; His pre-eminence, His incomparability and uniqueness, His all satisfying stock for our salvation and redemption, His all sufficiency for our sustenance and preservation, and His all adequacy for our future glorification and inheritance reserved for us eternally in Heaven. In Colossians 3:16, Paul says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." (Col. 3:16)

2. The critical significance of Fellowship

The hope of glory is in fellowship – meeting together as people in love and harmony. Paul prayed, "that their [the church] hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love" (2:2). In these words of Paul, all the popularly commended values of fellowship, unity or oneness in all spheres of life stare us in the face. In fellowship is oneness, in oneness is unity, and in unity is strength. Paul believed that the hearts of the Christians would be encouraged

to continue in their hope and faith, and to grow in the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Jesus the Christ. Thus their hope in Christ, the very mystery of God, which was being attacked by the false teachings, would remain sure and steadfast like an unwavering anchor.

Some Ghanaian languages have these to say on fellowship; *Hu m'ani so ma me nti na atwee mmienu nam; Baanu so a, emmia; Praye, wo yi baako a, na ebu, woka bom a, emmu.* The Gas say, *Ekomefeemɔ mli, hewale yɔɔ* - to them, "In unity lies strength". The Ewes intimate that; *Ne mia wɛ deka la mre dɔa nuse misanɔwo* - to it, 'we will give strength to each other if we walk in unity/live united.' We say that, a piece of burning firewood does not survive for long once it is separated from the rest, meanwhile, together with other pieces, it receives the mutual benefit of burning together. Many things do challenge our desire of quitting fellowships but God has great plans and purposes for us as we knit our hearts together.

Again, I have heard socially respected people who propagate 'solo Christianity' against going to church (fellowship), saying, *Nyame som dee, ene w'akoma mu* - Christianity is in your heart. People give so many excuses to refrain from fellowshiping with other Christians, which are actually in contrast to the Christ in us. In fellowship, we learn that "iron sharpens iron", we share our struggles, our fears, our confusions, our anxieties, and receive help and strength that establish us (James 5:16). In the face of heretic teachings and comments that attack the very foundation of our faith and hope, we are encouraged to be strengthened by our fellowship, and togetherness, living as people whose hearts are knit together in love. We are then able to receive the mutual support that helps us to remain strong in the hope of glory.

We must be certain that in fellowship we receive power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father (1:11,12). The Hebrew writer emphasized, "And let us consider how

to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Heb. 10:24-25). Precious one, fellowship – meeting together, is what we are talking about. Whether in a congregation or in generational or inter-generational groups, outreach groups, prayer groups, singing groups, and Bible study groups, the benefits are enormous. It keeps us growing in our Christian faith and in the hope of glory.

3. The uncompromised Prayer Factor

"Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison" (Col. 4:2,3).

We must understand that besides the word of God, nothing revives the spirit of the Christian more than prayer. Prayer revives us in times of trials, hardships and adversities. Humility with all sincerity, going before God in His will to open ourselves, our fears, and our weaknesses before Him connects us to divine resources that strengthen and embolden our soul, build and refresh our spirit and restore our courage in our hope in the Lord. No matter how down you are, no matter how weak or discouraged you may be, take it to the Lord in prayer, for no one goes before God in prayer and returns the same. Our God is a prayer answering God (Jam. 5:13).

Paul believed in prayers and he prayed for the church members, he called on them also to pray and pray constantly, and to pray for him also. We know the importance of prayer to victorious Christian life and successful ministry; therefore, we cannot do without prayer.

4. The Full Assurance of our Complete Redemption and Status

The Scripture assures Christians that "He [God, the Father of Jesus Christ] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (1:13-14).

Redemption – the action of regaining or gaining possession of something in exchange for payment or clearing debt; saving or being saved from sin. The glory had departed from humanity and we regain or gain this glory only in the assurance that, in Christ, we are totally forgiven (cf. Zech. 3:4; Mk. 3:28; Rom. 4:7-8). This assurance of our redemption and new status in Christ has and continues to produce great effects on Christians. With this assurance, our forefathers stood by their faith even in the face of death threats, persecutions, exposure to public ridicule and other forms of mistreatment. This has always deepened our hope in the glory, to resist pressures to yield to things that would make us compromise our Christian faith. It is said that, "If you do not value what you have, you are sure to lose it." Christians have preferred to die and preserve their redemption and new status in Christ than to lose them and save their earthly lives. The hymn writer wrote in the first stanza of *Faith of our fathers*, "Faith of our fathers, living still, in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword; Oh, how our hearts beat high with joy, whene'er we hear that glorious word. [Chorus] Faith of our fathers, holy faith, we will be true to thee till death!" (Frederick William Faber, 1849 v 1)

We also have this assurance of our redemption and new status in Christ. We need to be true to God till our lives on earth end for our total redemption. Let us walk as people wearing the helmet of salvation, with our minds and hearts insulated from false doctrines, in spite of dungeon, fire and sword. Amen!

5. Patience, Endurance, and a Life of Gratitude

In Colossians 1: 11, the Christian hope of glory is in "being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father." The right knowledge of God's will in the hope Christ offers us, with the assurance of our redemption and new status in Christ, and commitment to fellowship and prayer, produce in us patience in the face of trials and hardships in life. The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ may seem delayed, but the Lord told us, "For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay" (Habakkuk 2:3).

Let us stick to these elements and be strengthened with all power according to God's glorious might. Let us patiently wait for His appearance as He has promised. And we will endure and wait patiently with joy, and grateful hearts. We give thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. Precious one, we need not grumble in our hearts as we keep in step with Christ the hope of glory. The Bible says, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17). Many of us are losing our grip on this hope today. The complaints in the church are getting very loud each day, which indicates our impatience and selfish ambitions. Let us sit up and remember to keep in step with the faith as we reflect on Presbyterian Hymn numbered 603

*Asem biara me ka no, ade biara meye, anka ese se
mebisa se ebeye Yesu fe. Daa ese se mebisa se Ye
su kaa no saa ana? So obema me ho kwan a? Yesu
aye saa anaa?*⁵

⁵ Presbyterian Church of Ghana, *Hymn Book*, Waterville Publishing Hoose: Accra, 2000, 134.

6. Walking Worthy of the Lord; Our Responsibility.

If Paul had been asked, why we should be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, he would have answered; "so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10).

The final element for this discussion is our responsibility of walking in a manner worthy of the Lord. This involves having a mental attitude that seeks to please the Lord in all that we do. It also involves bearing fruit in every good work (1:10). Fruit bearing is progressive - we keep bearing fruit, and keep increasing in the areas in which we bear fruit.

Someone has said, "Christians are the Christ we did not see." This brings the truth to bear that, Christians are the revealing image of Jesus Christ to the world today (2 Cor. 3:2; 5:20). Our Christ-worthy life reflects Christ's glory to our society at all times so that people can appreciate the light in Christ. God is counting on us today to make His glory known in our generation. Having died with Christ let us bury all our past lives and clothe ourselves in the new garment Christ provides.

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION

With such Christological exposition, the notion that Christ is the hope of God's glory cannot be overemphasized. Christ Jesus being the image of the invisible God revealed unto humanity, we cannot find God anywhere apart from Jesus Christ, "No one comes to the Father except through Me (Jesus Christ)." We are not required to understand and appreciate creation outside of Christ because of His preeminence in all creation so we are careful not to be like Diotrefes who like to put first, himself and not submit to the authority and teachings of the Church.

When we learn that all things were created for Jesus Christ, it means that any study, discovery or research which delineates Him is questionable. The fullness of God dwells in Christ, makes Him the grand finale of all faiths and to say that the whole of creation is to be reconciled in and through Christ is to establish the fact that there will be no peace in this world outside the faith in and the values of our Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that it is in Christ that all things hold together is the greatest Christological key which is well expressed in our hymn which says, *oyi n'ani a na asee* (PH 50) – it is Jesus who holds the world and without Him things fall apart. He holds all sciences, humanities, the environment and the spiritual world together.

At this point that real hope is eluding the world; let us turn to our Lord Jesus Christ as the hope of glory. Let the theme: *Christ in you the hope of glory* demonstrate to this world that our hope does transcend our present circumstances; that our faith is not determined just by our circumstances, but by our hope in the Christ of glory. I am talking about our faith and hope in the God, who created the world out of nothing "*creatio mundi ex nihilo*"; the God who in the time of Elisha was able to raise the dead back to life; He was the Supreme Being who helped the Israelites to walk through the Red Sea when great armies chased them; He is still the One who gives us the power to overcome any Goliath in life. As the only person wielding power in

the whole world, He can make dry bones live again because He raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. This God helped Singapore, Japan, Malaysia and China to rise up within a few decades from third-world countries to be among developed countries. He has thought to help Ghana and Africa to resurrect from where they are into a developed and humane society.

Now unto Him who alone dwells in immortality, and unto Him who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, to our God of hope, be all honor, power and majesty, both in this world and in the world to come. Amen!

Shalom Aleichem...



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ABOUT THE BOOK

The book is an exposition on the theme, “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:27). Dealing with Colossian heresy, Paul called their teachings as vain deceit based on human tradition which denied Christ's sufficiency and belittled the Christian hope in His finished work on the cross. People were stealing the hearts and minds of those who are believed to focus on worldly traditions. The book unveils some of the heretic comments and teachings in our day which cloud our hope of glory.

What is this Christian hope of glory? What must we do to keep hold of this glory? Many Christians have gone back to their old ways due to unanswered heretic questions posed against their faith in Christ. This is the reason this book welcomes you to journey through the entire book of Colossians. The book is giving hope to those in despair, not to give up but to hold fast to that which is good – *quod bonum est tenete*.

The book brings out the central theme of the entire letter to the church in Colossae which was aimed to resist the heretic teachings and further bring clarity to the supremacy of Christ – the foundation of our faith. The book will bring you to a deeper understanding of the theme; *Christ in you, the hope of glory* as we grasp the truth on the sufficiency of Christ to bring all people to the expected glorification. Spend time with this book as it deepens your anchor in Christ Jesus and receive the truth of the Christian God.

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