

WCCC 2015

## Serving God's Purpose in Colossians 2

Ted Peng

*Colossians 1:9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding:*

*1: 18 – 19 And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell;*

*3: 3 – 4 For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in glory.*

*3: 10 – 11 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.*

I want to underline the words 'this new man', 'renew' and 'Christ is all and in all'.

*3: 18 – 19 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.*

*3: 23 – 24 And whatsoever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men. Knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for you serve the Lord Christ.*

Underline 'you serve the Lord Christ'. In verse 24, after Paul talked about very practical things, wives, husbands, fathers, slaves, masters and all that, he said 'we served the Lord Christ'.

*4:12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, salutes you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*

Underline 'to the end that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God'.

Lord, we come to You and really, really thank you for Your grace. Lord, we could never fully understand Your love towards us. You expect us higher than we can understand. And you want none other than and no smaller than Your glory to shine through us. So Lord, we humbly come to You this afternoon. We know You have words for us. So Lord, speak your servant hears. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Yesterday we shared upon this letter to the Colossians. Now this letter is actually very short with only four chapters. Our brother and I find it is so inadequate to explain this letter. So we beg brothers and sisters to read this letter yourself when you go home. Perhaps what we have shared with you is to give you points so you go home and can connect the dots. Maybe what we shared will help you understand what the Lord is trying to tell us.

Yesterday we shared that at the very beginning Paul told us that it is most important to know the will of God. We have to know the will of God right after we know the gospel. If we do not know the will of God, then there will be a big lacking in our spiritual wisdom and in our spiritual understanding. Also we will not be able to walk worthy of the Lord. And then it is not possible to please Him. And it will not be possible to bring fruits to our work. And it is not possible to really understand Him. And it is not possible when we want to endure with the Lord to endure in joy. So to have the full knowledge of God's will is very important.

Yesterday we mentioned from chapter 1 that the will of God is in His son, Jesus Christ. It is in Christ and His creation, Christ and His church. And His church ought to be the new man

according to Him. We thank the Lord that He is called the firstborn from the dead. That makes Him directly connected to us. By His resurrection we are justified. And because He is the firstborn from the dead, He led us to die with Him, to be buried with Him and to be risen with Him. And now we can walk with Him in this new life. And then He will lead us finally into glory. So we really thank the Lord. He has an expectation for us much higher than we know. And then Paul said 'Christ in you the hope of glory' in the first chapter towards to the end. Now the Lord actually said He reconciled us to Him and to God. This is by His death. And He has a very, very positive purpose. And it is to present us holy and without blemish and beyond reproach. What He meant is this, using the words in Ephesians 5 – it is the glorious church, holy without blemish.

So dear brothers and sisters, when the Lord reconciled us to Him by His death, He aims very high for you and for me. It is none other than glory. It is glory. Glory is with God. When God saw the tabernacle built, all according to Him, He was so pleased, His glory appears. And when His Son Jesus Christ was on the mount of transfiguration, a bright cloud came and a voice came through, saying 'This is My beloved Son. In Him I am delighted. Hear him'. What is glory? Glory is the manifested presence of God when He is satisfied. So when He saw His Son, He said 'this is My beloved Son in whom I am delighted'. Brothers and sisters, what does that have to do with us? How can we have anything to do with this glory? When the Lord's life becomes yours and mine, when we live according to it, when we live expressing that life, God's heart is then satisfied. These are just like My Son. Thank the Lord.

In Romans 8, it said that we are to be conformed to the image of His Son. When that happens, the bible said that His Son becomes the firstborn among brothers. Does glory have anything to do with us? It does. It is when the Lord's life becomes your life and my life, and we live and serve accordingly, and not only other people see us this way, but God sees it too and His heart is

satisfied. Then that is His glory. And that is how we are involved in this. Thank the Lord; Apostle Paul had this burden in him. So in this letter, the word glory keeps showing up. In the third chapter he said we are already dead with Him. Now our life is hidden in Him; Christ in our life. When He appears we will appear with Him in glory. Thank the Lord. That is our hope. But the more wonderful thing is that before we get to the end point, the life of Christ is already in us and we live with it. Yes, sometimes we struggle. And sometimes our soul life is very strong. But again and again Paul told us we ought to die with Christ. The bible did not say we have to die ourselves. But we die with Christ. If Christ is not our life, then there is no point of dying with Him. But thank the Lord, He is our life.

Sometimes when we think about 'he is the firstborn among the dead', we may have the wrong concept. He came to this world, He died and then He was resurrected. It is like an afterthought. But no, death and resurrection are from the beginning. In fact in Book of Revelation 13:8, it talks about a book of life of the slain Lamb from the foundation of the earth. So this Lamb is slain from the foundation of the earth. So this thought for Christ to die and to resurrect is from the very, very beginning. It is for your salvation and for my salvation and also for your glorification and for my glorification. It is a tremendous thing.

How does this work out practically? The Lord had already died and risen for us. In principle many of us have been baptized. When we were baptized, we were doing it willingly. We really meant that we died and buried with Him willingly. When we come up from the water we walk in the newness of life by the resurrection power. In Colossians chapter 3, Paul talked about how these things all worked out. He mentioned the 'new man'. When He talked about the new man, the key word is 'renewed'. He talked about putting off the old man and putting on the new man. And then he said 'renewed into full knowledge according to the image of Him that has created him'. So the key to this new man is renewal. Now this renewal is according to the image of the

one who created him. Now there is one who created him. This one who created him has an image. Colossians 1:15 said the image of the one who created him is Christ. So the new man is renewed according to Christ. Now this renewal in knowledge means the renewal in our understanding. In the past I was the old man, now I am supposed to be a new man. What has changed? The change is our understanding. Now this change is a fundamental change; a complete change. It is like the new wine has to be put in new wine skin and cannot be put into old wine skin. So it is a complete change. It is fundamental which means in the past it is according to me. And now it is totally according to Christ. My old man is of the earth – earthly. This new man is according to Christ and Christ is heavenly. I am of dust and He is spiritual. Christ is spiritual. This is in the 1 Corinthians 15. There is a huge difference between earthly and heavenly. There is a huge difference between spiritual and of dust. Christ is absolutely different from you and from me. So this new man, renewed, in the language of Ephesians is this: renewed in the spirit of the mind. It means the spirit of the thinking in our mind. It has changed. That means we are fundamentally different. In the past, the first thing I think of is me; I, me and mine. But now I am going to think about my brother. And this is the fundamental change of thinking. Right now you have to convince yourself to think about your brother. But thank the Lord that our Lord Jesus Christ is in us. Your immediate action is for your brother. The first reaction is for the brother. So this is the change: the renewal of the mind. It is also the renewal talked about in Ephesians. It is exactly the same thing; the new man in Colossians.

In the Chinese translation it said gradual. We need to understand this carefully. Gradually does not mean today I try to be a new man with my new thought and then this evening I go back to my old man and my old thought. And tomorrow things happen that will make it convenient for me to go back to my old man. So perhaps by the end of the year, I am a little better. It does not mean that. That will not be the renewal of the spirit of our mind. I think gradually means this. We go

through our life with a lot of challenges. Every day I face my brother at home. He always bothers me. In the afternoon I see my mom. She always wants me to do this and that. And at night I see my dad and he does not want me to go onto the internet and he does not want me to play computer games. What do we do? I think by the grace of God, by this new mind we pass the hurdle one at a time. I do not hate my brother anymore. I do not tell my mom that she talks too much. At night when my dad told me not to play computer games until two in the morning, and I said ok. Not only that, when you go to sleep at night and you pray to the Lord, Lord I thank you. You are getting me through these hurdles. It is very hard to do but Lord, I thank you, You have changed the spirit of my mind. I am a new man now. You are my life. This is an extremely practical thing. Is this easy? It is not easy, but by the grace of God, you can do it, and I can do it. God meant for us to go through these hurdles. He wants us to be a new man. We are to be renewed in our knowledge according to Christ. Thank the Lord, this is really our salvation. Then he went on to say that in this new man, there is no difference between circumcision and uncircumcision and there is no difference between the Greeks and the Jews. And there is no difference between barbarians and educated and there is no difference between status. This is very hard for us to get into. Somehow we are born to be prejudiced people. From the very beginning, we say me and you. When we grow up, in us there is that prejudice. But now this new man comes in, this new mind comes in, this Christ comes in, and He does not like that. He does not like our prejudice and certainly He does not like us to act that way or to think that way. It is hard for us to see that. It is hard for us to think that way. But unless we are willing to go that direction, His heart is not going to be satisfied. And there will be no glory for you, no glory for me and no glory for our gathering together. So he said we are one, no division. We thank the Lord for that. And then he said Christ is to be all and in all. Christ is all and in all. What does Christ is all means? It means Christ is all the fullness. It is what the new man lives according to.

It is what the new man aspires to. And Christ is that. And you lack nothing. And not only that, He is the full authority. He is the authority, He is the head. He is the direction and what He likes is to be what I like. What He feels ought to be what I feel. Not only that but especially for us to be together, whether at home, or in a church with brothers and sisters, His thinking has to be our thinking, His desire ought to be our desire. His purpose ought to be our purpose and His feeling ought to be our feeling. This is what it means He is all. It also said He is in all. In all can also be translated as He is in everyone. Christ has to be in each one of us and not only in each one of us but we have to let Him be active in each of us. He has to have the freedom in us. We cannot tell him, Lord, today we have too many things in my mind, would you please sit in the living room and leave me alone. Let me deal with my wife first. When we are done with that then we will come to you. Brothers and sisters, it is not like that. When Christ is in you and in me, it means He has the absolute freedom. This is again hard to do. But by the grace of the Lord, and because His life is in you and in me, we are able to do that.

When Christ was on earth, He followed every thought of the Father. There was nothing that His Father does not want to say and He said it. Everything that His Father wanted to do, He did. However His father judges, that was how He judges. He did not have His own time. His Father's timing was His timing. God's life is in you and in me. Have you let that life be free? Or do you say, please stay there and let me finish our problem, and then we come to you. Christ is all and in all. And that applies to our family, to when we gather together. It is wonderful to know that Christ is in here in each one of us. Not only in each one of us but He is in our midst. This is why when other people come to us, they said God has been here. And this is why when other people come here; they do not want to leave. This is why when other people come here they want to bring their children here even though they do not have the time to stay. The only reason is because Christ is here. So we thank the Lord, if He did not start that, if He did not give us the

energy and guidance to go this way, we would never believe this is possible. But it is He who started; it is He who guides us through. And He is the one who will conclude.

When we read and talk about He is the one who is the creator, He is the creator of the visible and invisible. Everything is created in Him, through Him and for Him. Therefore, He is all and in all means it is He who started and it is He who carries us through. Although it is difficult, although we have to endure, but He carries us through and He is the one who concludes. And this morning our brother said that in Ephesians, it said all things in heaven and on earth will be headed up in Him, summed up in Him. That is eternal and in the future, yet today Christ is all and in all. You can have a taste of that glory. This is the new man. The purpose of God is practically He is all and in all in our midst. To serve His purpose is to believe it. To serve His purpose is to let that happen. We thank the Lord.

Soon after this, Paul gave us the picture of the new life. He told us that we ought to be meek. In Colossians 3: 12-14 he talked about very good characters and these are wonderful characters.

These characters come either from Matthew 5 or Galatians 6. These characters – mercy, humility and meekness are of the heavenly kingdom from Mathew 5. The characters of love, peace, longsuffering and kindness are the fruits of the spirit from Galatians 6. The point is that all these are the characters of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Now if we take that seriously and let Lord Jesus Christ really dwell in us, then we have mercy, humility, meekness, love and mercy.

In Colossians 3:16 it said this new man will rejoice in the word of Christ. So not only this new man has these wonderful characters, but he also rejoices in the word of Christ, with singing with joy in the heart. This means when he reads the bible, he really sings in his heart. We all have this experience that the bible sometimes is hard to read. But we thank the Lord His grace is sufficient and it pleases the Father to reveal His Son in us, so we will understand the word of God. But here

it said the new man when he reads the bible there is singing in his heart. He likes it. He likes the word of God. This is wonderful.

Then Paul started to say this new man faces relation in the family and in work with a different attitude. There is a life and this life is the life of Christ. And this new man also has an attitude. This attitude is I am serving the Lord Christ. Therefore between husband and wife, there is a new relationship. Husband treats the wife like he is serving the Lord. The wife faces the husband like she is serving the Lord. This is very practical. The bible said that the wife submits to the husband. I have seen in most places, the sisters are more versed in the word of God. And they sometimes are more spiritual. In some places the husband has to go out to the farm to work. They do not have much time to study the bible. And this is especially in northern China. So the sister knows the bible more than the brother. So why do you have to submit to the husband? It is because you are serving the Lord and serving God. Because we are serving God, we are serving the Lord Christ. Husband shall love the wife. Ephesians even said the husband should give up his life for her. I live in southern California. They said the big earthquake will come anytime. I have to give my life for my wife. So next time when the earthquake comes, I will die first. Brothers and sisters, the earthquake will not come for a long time. And even after it comes, it will not happen again for a long time. The meaning of what the bible said is that the husband has to give his life for the wife daily. What that means actually is that we have to put down our dignity. The so called dignity is the most harmful thing. The husband cannot do it. But we are serving the Lord Christ.

About the relation between father and son, it said the son ought to obey the father. Again sometimes it is difficult. I am busy enough and I am going through growing pain and you do not understand me. But brothers and sisters, why do you have to obey your father? It is because you are serving the Lord Christ. Here it also said do not provoke your son to anger and more

importantly do not dishearten your son. I am saying this to the brother. The problem is that growing up, the one who always had to listen to me is my son. But our children are the property of the Lord Jehovah. And one of these days, my son will become my brother in the Lord. And that is how I should aim in bringing him up. One of these days, he is going to tell me, dad you are wrong. And I have to say yes. Now he will say the truth in love to me. And he is my brother in the Lord.

We now come to being a slave, or worker at work. We all know 99% of the bosses are not good. But the bible said you have to serve him not by pleasing him but serving him as if you are serving the Lord. The wonder is this, on the surface, it seems you lose, but in reality you become such a good worker there that your boss really would appreciate you because he has never seen a worker like this. Brothers and sisters, there is this Daniel in the bible. Daniel was in a foreign court. He served Nebuchadnezzar and then later he served Darius. He was in foreign court and had no freedom at all. He could not preach gospel to them. But somehow these kings saw the spirit of God in this young man. And they saw in him something much superior to any of their own people or subject. And then as time passed, Nebuchadnezzar got smaller and smaller and Daniel got bigger and bigger. And then Darius got smaller and smaller and Daniel got bigger and bigger. Still he was without freedom. Still any moment these people could put him to death. But these kings respected him. And of course he respected the kings too. This is an encouragement to us. Micah 5:7 said, 'and the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples as dew from Jehovah'. Brothers and sisters, the world is a desolate place. And they do not see the dew of the Lord. Now here is a remnant, they had no freedom, they were in a foreign country and yet the other people saw them as dew from God. So brothers and sisters, this is how we should be at work. I think what Colossians 3:24 said is very significant and fundamental. Not only do we have this life of Christ in us, but we should have an attitude that in anything we do or say we

serve Christ Jesus, whether at home or at work or among brothers and sisters. This is how we serve God's purpose.

Lastly Colossians 4 gave us a picture of some servants. The first picture is this brother by the name of Tychicus in Colossians 4:7. This is how Paul described this brother Tychicus 'the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-bondman in the Lord'. The first thing Paul said about this brother was that he was his beloved brother. The second thing he mentioned was that he was a faithful servant. The third thing was that he was a fellow bond servant. Beloved brother was a brother with love. Minister was one who did things. When he did things he was very, very faithful. The third thing was that he was a fellow bond servant.

Brothers and sisters, so there are three aspects to this brother. The first is that he was a simple brother. When we are in a church, when we are among brothers and sisters, the first thing we ought to be is that we ought to be a beloved brother. When other brothers and sisters come to you, they should not feel that they will be criticized. They are not going to feel that you are going to complain to the Lord about him. So the first thing is being a brother. In the church of Philadelphia, the Lord said I have loved you. So the Lord has given them His own love and they use this love from the Lord to love each other and among brothers. This is the beauty of the church in Philadelphia and this is something we ought to do – being just a brother.

The second thing is faithful minister. It simply means that he did things. We really thank the Lord there are so many ministers here. Some of them wear these green shirts and some of them do not. But no matter what, they are faithful ministers. We all need to be that. Every Sunday and other days we come together, we do as much as we are able to do. And even we do beyond what we can do. Even sometimes you lose sleep and even sometimes you are so tired, but by the grace of the Lord you do it.

But the most precious thing is being a bond servant. Bond servant is a heart attitude. It is towards the Lord and the Lord is always right. We have no complaints. Whatever He wants, that is what we want. And we try to know what He wants. In the story of this prodigal son in Luke 15, there was this servant, the bond servant. When the prodigal son – the second son came back, and the dad went to hug him and the dad said bring this ring and bring this robe and bring these sandals and kill the fat cow. This bond servant knew exactly what the master wanted. The bond servant knew what ring, what robe, what sandals and what cow. His heart and mind had never left the master. The master did not need to explain to him many things because the bondservant knew. Brothers and sisters, this is the mind of a bond servant. That was Tychicus. And that ought to be you and me.

And then Paul talked about another servant by the name of Epaphras. He said, Epaphras had a burden and he often prayed for them. And what did he pray for? He prayed that they could stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. There are four things here. First it is all the will of God. And then he said to stand. Brothers and sisters, in the entire book of Colossians Paul wrote three times about ‘stand’ or ‘present’. When he talked about Lord Jesus, he said the Lord Jesus reconciled us to God in order to present us. And then Paul said he preached and worked in order to present us to God in Christ perfect. And the third thing was about Epaphras. Epaphras worked so that we can stand before God perfect and complete in all the will of God. So brothers and sisters, present and stand. It means we are standing there and the Lord God looks at us and He sees us to be perfect and He sees us to be complete in all His will. This is a tremendous thing. This is how the book of Colossians gives us examples when it was talking about ‘stand’ and ‘present’. And this is the Lord Jesus’ work. This was Paul’s work and this was Epaphras’ work. It ought to be your work and my work.

Today we are sitting here. We have brothers and sisters sitting on our left and right. Our burden ought to be that my brother would be able to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. Nothing should be less than that. It may take us a long time to do this. It may take us a long time to make the sister sitting on our left to be like that. But that is Lord Jesus' work. That was Paul's work. That was Epaphras' work. So it is your work and it is my work.

Brothers and sisters, what is complete and what is perfect? Complete means it has everything necessary. When you read Ephesians 1, you see that all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places are in Christ. That in essence is the completeness. And another translation in the bible is to fill full. And complete means to fill full. In Colossians 2, it actually said it pleases God that this fullness dwells in Christ. All the fullness of the godhead dwells fully in Christ. And we are complete in Him. So in Christ Jesus there is this fullness and we are filled full. And this is what complete means. With regards to this word perfect, it means to be matured. It does not talk about a lot of things but about the time. It talks about we see a perfect goal in the Lord and He is leading us towards the goal to the very end. The Lord said something similar in the Gospel of John; the Lord Jesus loves those who belong to Him in this world and He loves them to the end. So perfect means to the end. The Lord Jesus will work on you and on me. Towards the end we are almost perfect. But even before that, we are mature. That is the idea here. Paul worked and Epaphras worked so that they helped us walk in the Lord to the very end, even when we are not mature. There is this example of King David. We know that David was not perfect. He committed sins. And He had a lot of mistakes. But why did the Lord say I had found David who was after my heart, and He would do all my will. David was not perfect but God said He was after my heart. Both the Chinese and English translations are very meaningful. The Chinese translation said that He just fits my heart. He is just like perfect. But the English translation said after my heart. It is like one heart chasing another heart. There was the heart of the Lord there.

And there was the heart of David. And David's heart was always chasing the heart of the Lord. So the end of God's heart was the end of David's heart. So we often said David was not perfect but God said his heart was perfect. In reality he was chasing God's heart every moment of the day. Therefore although he made mistakes, the Lord restored him. He came back and he served the purpose of God to the end of his life. David died young at seventy years old. Saul was eighty and Samuel was probably older. David was seventy years old when he died. But as our brother quoted this morning in the bible Acts 13:36 the first part, David served the people in his generation. Another translation is that David served God's purpose in his generation and then he slept. Brothers and sisters, this is the meaning of the word perfect. Perfect is the perfect heart. Our heart pursues the heart of God all the time. Perhaps we make mistakes but the grace of God restores us. And sometimes it is painful but He restores us. And by that He leads us to the end of our life. And that is the meaning of perfect. Whether it is Paul or Epaphras, this is how they served the people. They served so that God's people can stand perfect in the will of God. The Book of Isaiah 61: 3 said 'to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, that beauty should be given unto them instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness: that they might be called terebinths of righteousness, the planting of Jehovah, that He may be glorified'. Here we see the term called the tree of righteousness. I think what Paul and Epaphras were trying to do so that the saints can stand perfect and complete was like this tree of righteousness. Chapter 61 is the anointed servant of the Lord and what He will do. Now He said, for those who mourn in Zion, He will turn the ashes into beauty and He will turn the sadness into oil of joy. And He will turn them into tree of righteousness. It is planted by God for His glory. So brothers and sisters, this was what He promised to those people who mourned in Zion. Brothers and sisters, if you do not mourn for Zion, if you do not care about His church, if you do not care about His purpose and if you do not care about His people, then this

verse means nothing to you. But if you do care, if you do mourn for Zion, then He said, He will turn your sadness into the oil of joy. And not only that, He is going to make you tree of righteousness. And this tree of righteousness is planted by God. It means the seed comes from Him. The life comes from Him. And then He said it is for His glory.

Dear brothers and sisters, you see these very, very tall trees around us here. They are green all the time. Every year they are refreshed. Every year they are renewed. The weather could be bad. It could be cold, it could be stormy, and it could be ice, but the tree is still there. If you go to California, these redwoods in Sequoia Park, some of them are more than three thousand years old. When Abraham walked in the Palestine, these trees were already in California. The point is the life in the tree is strong. There has been thunder, lightning, storm, wind, rain and yet the tree is still there. And the Lord planted and it is for His glory. So dear brothers and sisters, this is what the Lord meant for you and me to be. And this is also your work and my work. Today the sister or brother sitting on your side, if they mourn for Zion, the Lord is going to make them and you tree of righteousness and for His glory. When people come from far away, they see a bunch of trees over there and the trees stand tall. They are together, and the people said look this is Zion and they give glory to God. This is I believe how God wants you and me to serve His purpose.

Lord, we really thank you that in our really short time on earth, You have this expectation for us. It is nothing less than Your glory shining through us. Lord, we really thank you that Your word has given us a very practical path to that. Lord, we really pray that You give us a heart willing to die with You. And willing to live with Your resurrection life and willing to abandon ourselves for the sake of Your church and to live and serve each other. That You can see us as Your tree of righteousness and You can see us as complete and perfect in all the will of God. Lord we thank you for Your grace. In the name of the Lord Jesus we pray. Amen.