I. A Struggle in Perfecting People in Christ

A. I've said again and again that almost every subject Paul wrote about in Colossians seemed to attack the heresy of Gnosticism (so, if he was repetitive, I will be, too, and explain it again). Gnosticism taught that God made the spiritual realm and a demon made the material realm, attaching our spirits to these physical bodies. They taught the spirit is valuable, but the body is worthless. They did not believe Jesus came in the flesh, but only appeared to be human. Gnostic teachers offered their disciples special knowledge or gnosis, which could enable them help divide their spirits from their bodies and live spiritually, based on that knowledge. (Joke: "Now, why I keep repeating this is because...there will be a test at the end of this series...].)

B. Paul's personal testimony about bringing Christians to perfection in Christ, mentions the very opposite of the Gnostic dualism (he starts by lifting up the part of our being the Gnostics put down).

1. v.24. Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. (This body-friendly verse sounds strange because of it body-language verse; there is mysterious power in our physical beings that can be tapped for spiritual purposes.)

   a. We are spirit-body beings, an organic, holistic unity of heavenly spirit and cosmic dust. (What affects the spirit affects the body; what affects our bodies affects our spirits.)

   b. In the realm of his flesh, Paul said physical suffering released power to bless others, as Christ's sufferings did. [App: What do we do with our bodily sufferings? Offer them to Satan with anger, or to God with thanksgiving--1 Th 5:18, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.]

2. In the realm of his spirit, Paul said in v.29, To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. (All humans have spirits, and spiritual energy, but the human energy in a Christian is energized by divine power from the Holy Spirit.)

TRANS: As spirit-body beings, our Christian destiny is to govern both the spiritual and the physical universe along with Christ. But God is not waiting till later to teach us how that is done. God's future goal for redeemed humanity must begin in us now. That's why there is...
live out our lives in the knowledge of (v.26) "the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints." What is that mystery? (v.27) "...Christ in you, the hope of glory."

1. Whenever you see that word "hope" mentioned in relationship to salvation, think about resurrection—Rom 8:19, 23, 24a. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed ... Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.

2. We are God's children of by new birth, but our ultimate destiny as "sons of God" will not be revealed until we are like the Son of God, who is the "firstborn from among the dead"

3. Do you know why creation is waiting for this hope? Because, it has been told about it—Col 1:23, continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

B. How do believers get "perfect" or mature or complete or grown up in the "hope of glory" in Christ? Paul said in v.2-3, My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

1. We need to be "encouraged in heart," because we still can get angry with our physical and circumstantial trials in this world, when we need to offer them up to God in thanksgiving.

2. We need to be "united in love," because our destiny is not "my Christian life," but "his body, which is the church," a new corporate humanity of resurrected "sons of God," serving the Son of God, who is "firstborn over all creation."

3. We need to learn "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" in Christ, because false teachers abound around us, like the Gnostics, who, as Paul said in v.4, "may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments."

CONCLUSION:
--God has a great future ahead for us, but the King of that future is already living inside us. God doesn't want us to wait till we get there. His future goal for redeemed humanity must begin in us now.