

Colossians 2:1-8
September 1, 2024

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: How can we stand firm in our faith when confronted with false teachings or human philosophy? [Let people engage]

Transition: Paul is contending for the Colossians through prayer in his jail cell! And he makes it clear when he says, “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. And why does Paul emphasize Christ? Because “For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” AKA, Jesus is God in the flesh, so we are following His teachings, not false teachers, or the latest cultural ideas of how we should live our life. There’s a lot in today’s text, and I will leave the door open to revisit it next week if we need to. Let’s begin.

BOOK:

2 I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. ² 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, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

Freedom From Human Regulations Through Life With Christ

⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

We see how the growing Christian can easily defeat the enemy and not be led astray. If our spiritual roots are deep in Christ, we will not want any other soil. If Christ is our sure foundation, we have no need to move. If we're studying and growing in the Word, we will not be easily enticed by false doctrine. And if our heart is overflowing with thanksgiving, we will not even consider turning from the fullness we have in Christ. A grounded, growing, grateful believer will not be led astray.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 2, pp. 124-125). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

I recall a story about a pastor who was concerned about some unsavory businesses that had opened near a school. His protests finally led to a court case, and the defense attorney did all he could to embarrass the Gospel minister.

“Are you not a pastor?” the lawyer asked. “And doesn't the word *pastor* mean ‘shepherd’?”

To this definition the minister agreed.

“Well, if you are a shepherd, why aren't you out taking care of the sheep?”

“Because today I'm fighting the wolves!” was the pastor's quick reply, and a good answer it was.

Knowing that there were enemies already attacking the church in Colossae, Paul offered encouragement. By heeding his admonitions, the Colossians would overcome their enemies.

Keep Making Spiritual Progress (Col. 2:4-7)

In the Christian life, we never stand still: we either go forward or gradually slip backward. “Let us go on to maturity!” is the call we must obey (Heb. 6:1, literal translation). The Christian who is not making spiritual progress is an open target for the enemy to attack and destroy.

The need for progress (v. 4). Satan is deceptive. He wants to lead believers astray, and to do this, he uses deceptive words. The Greek term used here describes the persuasive arguments of a lawyer. Satan is a liar (John 8:44) and by his lies he leads believers into the wrong path. It is

important that we exercise spiritual discernment, and that we continue to grow in our knowledge of spiritual truth.

The nature of progress (vv. 5–7). In order to emphasize his admonition, Paul used several vivid pictures to illustrate spiritual progress.

The army (v. 5). The words *order* and *steadfastness* are military terms. They describe an army that is solidly united against the enemy. *Order* describes the arrangement of the army in ranks, with each soldier in his proper place. Not everybody can be a five-star general, but the general could never fight the battle alone. *Steadfastness* pictures the soldiers in battle formation, presenting a solid front to the enemy. Christians ought to make progress in discipline and obedience, just as soldiers on the battlefield.

The pilgrim (v. 6). The Christian life is compared to a pilgrimage, and believers must learn to walk. Paul had already encouraged his readers to “walk worthy of the Lord” (Col. 1:10), and later he used this image again (Col. 3:7; 4:5). In the Ephesian epistle, the companion letter to the Colossian epistle, Paul used the image at least seven times (Eph. 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15).

We are to walk in Christ the same way we originally received Christ—*by faith*. The gnostic teachers wanted to introduce some “new truths” for Christian maturity, but Paul denounced them. “You started with Christ and you must continue with Christ,” Paul wrote. “You started with faith and you must continue with faith. This is the only way to make spiritual progress.”

The tree (v. 7a). *Rooted* is an agricultural word. The tense of the Greek word means “once and for all having been rooted.” Christians are not to be tumbleweeds that have no roots and are blown about by “every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14). Nor are they to be “transplants” that are repeatedly moved from soil to soil. Once we are rooted by faith in Christ, there is no need to change the soil! The roots draw up the nourishment so that the tree can grow. The roots also give strength and stability.

The building (v. 7b). *Built up* is an architectural term. It is in the present tense: “being built up.” When we trust Christ to save us, we are put on the foundation; from then on, we grow in grace. The word *edify* that is found often in Paul’s letters simply means “to build up.” To make spiritual progress means to keep adding to the temple to the glory of God.

The school (v. 7c). It is the Word of God that builds and strengthens the Christian. Epaphras had faithfully taught the Colossian believers the truth of the Word (Col. 1:7). But the false teachers were undermining that doctrine. Today, Christians who study the Word become established in the faith. Satan has a difficult time deceiving the Bible-taught believer.

The river (v. 7d). The word *abounding* is often used by Paul. It suggests the picture of a river overflowing its banks. Our first experience in the Lord is that of drinking the water of life by faith, and He puts within us an artesian well of living water (John 4:10–14). But that artesian well should become a “river of living water” (John 7:37–39) that grows deeper and deeper. The image of the river flowing from the sanctuary (Ezek. 47) getting deeper as it flows, probably is what Paul had in mind. Sad to say, many of us are making no progress—our lives are shallow trickles instead of mighty rivers.

Again, Paul mentioned “thanksgiving” (see Col. 1:3, 12). A thankful spirit is a mark of Christian maturity. When a believer is abounding in thanksgiving, he is really making progress!

By reviewing these pictures of spiritual progress, we see how the growing Christian can easily defeat the enemy and not be led astray. If his spiritual roots are deep in Christ, he will not want any other soil. If Christ is his sure foundation, he has no need to move. If he is studying and growing in the Word, he will not be easily enticed by false doctrine. And if his heart is

overflowing with thanksgiving, he will not even consider turning from the fullness he has in Christ. A grounded, growing, grateful believer will not be led astray.

Lightner, R. P. (1985). *Colossians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 676) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

H. Education (wisdom) in Christ (2:1–5).

2:1. Paul's labor (*agōna*, **struggling**; cf. 1:29; 4:12) of love was not limited to those he personally knew; it extended to **all who had not met him personally**. This is a clear indication that Paul had not started this or other churches in the Lycus Valley. The mention of **Laodicea** (cf. 4:16) indicates that the heresy had spread there too, though it was probably centered in Colosse.

2:2–3. Paul's stated **purpose** was that **they might be encouraged in heart and united in love**. Confidence and strength of conviction as well as cohesive unity yield a full understanding of the truth. There is no full knowledge apart from moral commitment. **Complete understanding** (*syneseōs*, "insight") results from complete yielding. And this understanding is Christocentric. This insight into God's ways enables believers to **know** (*epignōsin*) Christ fully. **Christ**, as the true **mystery of God**, reveals God to man (cf. John 1:18; Heb. 1:2–3). For in Him **are hidden** (cf. Col. 1:26) **all the treasures of wisdom** (*sophia*, cf. 1:9) **and knowledge**. Knowledge is the apprehension of truth; wisdom is its application to life. Knowledge is prudent judgment and wisdom is prudent action. Both are found in Christ (cf. Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 12:8) whose wisdom is foolishness to the world (1 Cor. 1:21–25), but who is the power of God by which a believer receives "righteousness, holiness, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).

2:4–5. Only this full knowledge and wisdom of Christ can keep a believer from being deceived **by fine-sounding arguments** (*pithanologia*, occurring only here in the NT, is lit., "persuasive speech" that uses plausible but false arguments). Truth and persuasion do not always correlate. Error can persuade, and truth can be compelling at times. It all depends on whether one has the *full* truth and a complete *commitment* to it. Hence even **though** Paul was **absent from the** Colossians, he delighted in **how orderly** (cf. 1 Cor. 14:40) **and how firm** (steadfast, solid) their **faith in Christ** was.

I. Exhortation to live in Christ (2:6–7).

2:6–7. These two verses conclude the argument begun in 1:15. Paul's point may be summarized thus: Divine exaltation belongs to Christ (1:15–20); in Him are found (a) reconciliation to God (1:21–23), (b) the revelation of the mystery of Christ (1:24–27), (c) believers' perfection (1:28–29), and (d) education (wisdom) (2:1–5). Therefore, believers should continue to live in Him (vv. 6–7).

The Christian life continues as it commenced: **just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him**. Paul gave the same kind of exhortation to others (cf. 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6). Since their faith initially laid hold decisively on the apostolic gospel, Paul exhorted them not to forsake its divine authority for any human sophistry. For with these divine roots (**rooted ... in Him**) that began in the past they can be continually **built up** (edified) and **strengthened in the faith**. If they did so they would not be blown to and fro with every wind of doctrine (Eph.

4:14). As believers are “built up” in Christ, they become more grateful and are **overflowing with thankfulness** (cf. Col. 1:12).

Dockery, D. S. (1998). The Pauline Letters In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 591). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

MINISTRY FOR THE CHURCH (1:24–2:5)

The second major part of the letter described Paul’s apostolic ministry for the church. Paul’s ministry task involved making known the mystery of God concerning Christ to the Gentiles in general and to the churches of Colosse in particular. Paul’s service was to make known to Gentiles the “mystery” that God had kept hidden from the world but has now revealed to people like Paul. Paul worked to bring about the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church so he could “present everyone perfect in Christ”.

Paul’s efforts on behalf of the Gentiles were intended to help them know the meaning of God’s “mystery” about Christ. By mystery Paul meant that God has now revealed something formerly concealed. The mystery is the fact that Gentiles are now made fellow members with Jewish Christians.

Fields, W. C. (1972). Colossians. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (pp. 754-755). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Paul’s Concern (Col. 1:24–2:7)

Here the apostle inserts a statement of his credentials for presuming to correct their doctrine. His own ministry is partly one of suffering to prove as well as to proclaim God’s redeeming love for the church.

The apostle ends this statement regarding his own ministry by a review of his purpose for them. It is that they may be “knit together in love,” that they may have the “riches of the full assurance of understanding” (2:2), and possess “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (v. 3). He therefore warns them against being led astray by enticing words (vv. 4–7).

Special points—Paul regards his own sufferings as a means to an end. “For by means of my physical sufferings I help complete what still remains of Christ’s sufferings on behalf of his body, which is the church” (1:24, TEV).

“The mystery which hath been hidden” (v. 26) is phraseology taken from the Gnostics. In Paul’s understanding, a mystery is a truth peculiar to Christianity not discoverable by human reason but revealed by God.

Paul’s words, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (v. 27) refer to the fact that God is visible now to the world as he appears in the lives of Christians.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Colossians 2:1-8. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.