

Paul's Letter to the Colossians

Chapter 2

“False teachers were telling the Colossian church that Jesus Christ was not sufficient; they needed some additional spiritual experiences. They taught that Jesus himself was inadequate and this inadequate Jesus couldn't provide all they needed for a full spiritual experience. Paul countered this claim by telling the Colossian believers, as well as their modern counterparts, that Jesus is the fullness of God and that because of their relationship with him, they have been given fullness. The treasure is Christ, who is in them. Paul tells them in this chapter not to look for other treasure when the true treasure is already theirs. (Anders)

2:1 I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. 2 My goal 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.

As I said in the first chapter, Paul did not plant this church or the church in Laodicea. He says that he has a great struggle on their behalf. (NASB) It is an internal struggle of spiritual warfare and true caring. Probably the same type of struggle that he had for the churches that he planted.

In our study of Paul's letters to the Corinthian church, we learned it must have been difficult for Paul to preach the gospel message and get the church started, then walk away. He did stop in from time to time on his travels but not at the Colossian church. As it says in these verses, they had not seen him face to face.

In verse 2, Paul says that he wants them to be “*encouraged and united in love*” so that they can fully understand the mystery of God which is Jesus as the Christ. I believe that this is God's will for every church today.

I heard a sermon regarding the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus told His disciples and all believers to “Go” into the world and “Teach” the gospel. This verse is part of the “Teach” portion of the commission.

When a church is united in love, they can work together to keep Satan at bay. They can work together without conflict because they have no hidden agendas. I think of VBS when I read these verses. During the weeks leading up to and during VBS, everything is focused on the children. It is about teaching them about salvation through Jesus. It is love that helps us teach the children, we can be encouraged because they soak Jesus up like sponges. Without our love and unity, we would have conflict. God would not bless our VBS.

I see our church as a “Teach” church. Yes, we do really well with VBS or events close to home but we don’t really “Go”. Mission trips or working to equip our members to go outside their comfort zone and outside our church, doesn’t fall into our wheelhouse.

Verse 2 says that the mystery of God is Christ. So many people don’t understand salvation through Jesus Christ. Human nature tells us to live by survival of the fittest. Looking out for number one is the rule. Everyone for themselves. This is opposite of what Jesus taught, love God above all and love others as yourself just doesn’t make sense.

When he says “*understand Christ, the mystery of God*”, I think of what King David wrote in Psalm 8. “*What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?*” David goes on to list things some status things, like making them just below angels and making them rulers but the real mystery is Jesus. Why did you send your only begotten Son to His death, to bring salvation to them?

Human nature also says that you have to work for what you want. “What do you mean to get into heaven I only have to put my faith in Jesus?” “Right but what are the steps that I have to follow?” “Grace, what do you mean it is a gift from God?” It is all a mystery.

Guzik says that three mysteries are described in Colossians 1:24 through 2:3:
The Church as the Body of Christ, for which Paul suffered and served (1:24-26).
The Indwelling Christ, the hope of glory in each individual believer (1:27).
The Revealed Jesus, the treasury of all wisdom and knowledge (2:2-3).

Paul writes in verse 3, “*Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*” The Greeks were obsessed with wisdom and knowledge. They must have had an influence here in Colossae. He ran into the same pursuit of wisdom and knowledge in the church at Corinth (Greece). In 1 Corinthians 1:30 Paul says, “*Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*”

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 disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

Verse 4 says that he wants them to be informed so they “*won’t be deceived by well-crafted arguments.*” Just like today, there are people using a gospel type message to get rich or to gain notoriety. They may not have had television back then but they still made a living out of deceit. Consider Simon the magician in Acts 8 who wanted to buy the trick of the Holy Spirit so that he could make money from it.

In verse 5, Paul says that even though they are separated by physical distance, he is with them in spirit. He is praying for them, his thoughts are for their success in serving God and being obedient to Him.

Paul has said this before with the church at Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, the church was meeting about a man who was living with his father's wife. Paul couldn't be present physically, but through prayer he was there spiritually. He said, "*4 So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5 hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.*"

This is more than just praying about it and giving it to God and moving on. Paul is deeply moved regarding the success of this church in reaching others for Christ and their faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus.

Romans 8:26-27 tells us part of the function of the Holy Spirit. It says, "*26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.*" I believe that God knows what is burdening our hearts and minds. A thought is prayer. There are times when we can fall on our knees and pray but there are also times when a thought or as Paul says a "wordless groan" is all that is needed because the Holy Spirit does the rest.

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

In verse 6, Paul says we are to live **in** Jesus. As Christians, we have claimed Jesus as our Lord and Savior. We are to live more and more like Him every day. Our goal is to live like Him, unfortunately Satan and our sin nature get in the way. We are to persevere and stay true to Jesus' teachings.

Read Matthew 24:9-14. At the beginning of His Olivet Discourse (Jesus tells His disciples about the End Times), Jesus tells us that to those who persevere or "stand firm to the end will be saved." Paul is telling the Colossian church the same thing. "You chose to follow Jesus, continue to do so whatever happens."

As Paul continues in Colossians 2:6, he says that traveling down the road to Jesus also requires growth. We are not to say, "Step 1. I accepted Jesus as my Savior. Check. Step 2. I was baptized. Check. Now I am done." This is the proper start but growth is essential. Just like in our human relationships, we must grow closer to Jesus, through prayer, Bible study and church attendance.

“Paul used a curious combination of metaphors. As Christians, we walk, but we are also rooted, and we are also built up. The metaphors are somewhat mixed, but the message is clear: be established and keep growing.” (Guzik)

Paul tells the Colossian church to “*walk in Jesus*” (NASB). In John 15:5, Jesus says, “*“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*” As we learned in our Tony Evans study, self-reliance will lead to failure but if we rely on the strength that comes from walking in Jesus, we can accomplish anything, even defeat Satan. Philippians 4:13 says, “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*”

Ephesians 3:20-21 tells us, “*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.*” We tend to put human limitations on God. We say, “Why pray? He can’t fix this problem.” Just because we don’t see a way out, doesn’t mean that God can’t fix it beyond our wildest dreams.

Even if He doesn’t fix it the way that we want, He will be with us through the trials and problems. Isaiah 46:4 tells us, “*Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.*” What an amazing promise.

In chapter 1 of this letter, Paul told the church that he was always thankful for them. Here he tells them that they too must be thankful to God for salvation and all that He has done for them.

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

When I read this verse, I think of David Koresh and the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas. The NLT says, “*Don’t let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world.*” There are so many false prophets today with “high-sounding nonsense”. If you do not get into the Word of God and know what it says, you will run the risk of following non-biblical teachings.

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray the Lord’s prayer, He included, “*Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*” This is what He was also meaning. Help us stay true to the good shepherd and only follow Him. Throughout the New Testament we are constantly being warned not to be taken in by false prophets.

Read Matthew 7:15-19. In verse 15 Jesus warns us, “*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.*” These people are of Satan and not God.

Consider our school systems and the issue of evolution. They teach evolution as a fact, yet it is only a theory of man. We try to rationalize the Bible and millions of years and it cannot be done. Accepting evolution destroys the foundation of the Bible, if our children are taught to question the Word of God from the beginning, then they are off to a bad start.

9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

Do you believe that “Jesus was fully man and fully God”? When nonbelievers attack our faith in Christ, they usually attack it in two ways. They say “Jesus really wasn’t God, He was just a man.” They can also attack you for your faith in Jesus. In verse 9, Paul states that Jesus was the fully of God in human form or fully God and fully man.

People say the Bible doesn’t really say that Jesus is God. Jesus said in John 10:30, “*I and the Father are one.*” Numerous times Jesus referred to himself as “I Am” which is the name that God gave Himself while talking to Moses. Here is a list of 8 of the times that He called Himself “I Am”.

I am the Bread of Life: John 6:35, 41, 48, 51

I am the Light of the World: John 8:12

I am the Door: John 10:7, 9

I am the Good Shepherd: John 10:11, 14

I am the Resurrection and the Life: John 11:25

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: John 14:6

I am the Vine: John 15:1, 5

Take courage! It is I. (I am) Don’t be afraid.: Matthew 14:27

“*All the fullness of the Godhead bodily*: The false teaching among the Colossian Christians was something like an early form of the Gnostic heresies that would come later. These Gnostic heresies made a radical separation between the *spiritual* and the *material*. That is why Paul needed to make it clear that all the fullness of the Godhead was in Jesus bodily, not in some strange, mystical sense. John also dealt with this false teaching in 1 John 4:2-3 and other passages.” (Guzik)

In verse 10, Paul repeats what Jesus said in Matthew 28:18, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (Jesus).*” Guzik says that “The false teaching among the Colossian Christians emphasized these lesser spirit beings, but Paul makes it clear that Jesus is far above them.”

11 In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Verse 11 says, *“When you came to Christ, you were “circumcised,” but not by a physical procedure.”* Paul is not talking about the surgical procedure in a physical sense. In order to convert Judaism, a man would have to be circumcised. This would be a real deterrent for any adult man. At that time, circumcision set the Jews apart from everyone else.

To a Jew circumcision was representative of putting off the sins of the flesh. When a man accepts Jesus as His Savior and is baptized, then Paul is saying that he is spiritually circumcised as it says in the NLT. It is *“the cutting away of your sinful nature”*. Anders says, “No religious ritual can make us alive with Christ.”

Verse 12 is an important verse regarding baptism. If you were baptized by Pastor Larry, you would have heard him recite something very similar when he pulled you up out of the water. *“You have been buried with Christ through baptism, walk with Him in the newness of life.”* Paul says much the same thing in Romans 6:4, *“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”*

Paul says, *“having been buried with him in baptism”* which is in the past tense. When they accepted Christ and were baptized, it “was their conversion, the inward circumcision of the heart, by which they entered on the blessings of the New Covenant.” (Peake)

What is the New Covenant that Peake was talking about? Galatians 3:7-9 says, *“7 Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. 8 Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” 9 So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”* As children of faith then we are accepted as the children of God. John 1:12-13 says, *“12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”*

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Romans 6:23 says, *“For the wages of sin is death”*. As sinners we deserve death. But the very next verse says, *“but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* This is what grace is, we get what we do not deserve.

Verse 13 in Colossians 2 says, “*When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh*”. When were we dead? When we hadn’t claimed Jesus as our Savior, when we were nonbelievers. Remember the circumcision is spiritual and not physical. (see Colossians 2:11)

Paul takes it further in Romans 5:10a, he says, “*For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son*”. As nonbelievers we were not only dead but we were “*God’s enemies*”.

As the old hymns asks, “What can wash away my sin?”, the answer is “Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” That is what Colossians 2:13 is saying. Our sins have been washed away and only Jesus can do this for us. We can’t do it ourselves. “*God made you alive with Christ.*” Another relatively new hymn says, “He paid a debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay, I needed someone to wash my sins away”. We could not do it ourselves. This was God’s plan all along.

Verse 14 says how He did it. God was willing to cancel our “sin debt”. When someone commits a crime, then they have to pay a debt to society. That debt is paid off when they pay financially or are finished with their time in prison. As we read above in Romans 6:23, the sin debt that we owe is death, a death without God. God was willing to take what Jesus did on the cross as full payment for our sin debt but only if we know Jesus and He knows us.

Where does Paul say our sin is now? At the end of verse 14, Paul says God took care of our sin debt by “*nailing it to the cross*”. That is what grace is.

In verse 15, Paul says that Jesus “*disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them*”. In the physical realm, Jesus did this to the Sanhedrin and the Roman leadership when He resurrected. More than 500 people saw Him and not just the 12 disciples. On the spiritual side, Satan thought he had won but Jesus “*made a public spectacle*” of him, even today.

“On the cross, Jesus won a decisive victory, making clear to the universe that Satan is a vanquished foe. This does not mean that we will not have conflict. The devil has been defeated, but he has not yet conceded defeat. He has been overthrown, but he has not yet been fully eliminated. Satan continues to harass us. When we understand our identity in Christ, we can live above Satan's control.” (Anders)

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. 18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. 19 They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

In verse 16, Paul explains why as Christians we do not celebrate the Jewish holidays and feasts, and why we aren't concerned with what is eaten is clean and unclean. What was eaten or drank or celebrated was huge in Jewish culture.

In Acts 10:15, Peter has a vision regarding clean and unclean food. A voice is heard by Peter that said, *"Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."*

Regarding the Jewish holidays or feasts, the Jews would put the celebration of their holidays and feasts above celebrating God. Jesus pointed out in John 14:6, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* So how do we get to Heaven, by celebrating holidays and feasts? We can't and it doesn't prevent us from getting to Heaven. Only through our faith in Jesus can we get to Heaven and nothing else. These things were meant to remind us about how faithful God was.

When the Christian Counsel in Jerusalem (Acts 15) passed a requirement that salvation comes from faith in Jesus but they also added other restrictions. It said (verse 29) *"You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things."*

Paul was opposed these additional requirements and it shows up in these verses in Colossians. He believed salvation comes from Christ alone. Anything added to salvation from grace through faith *"are only shadows of the reality yet to come."*

"The point is clear: days and foods, as observed under the Mosaic Law, are not binding upon New Covenant people. The shadow has passed, the reality has come. So for the Christian, *all* foods are pure (1 Timothy 4:4-5) and *all* days belong to God." (Guzik)

In verse 18, Paul says not to listen to people *"insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels."* Guzik says, "These aspects of false humility and the worship of angels were parts of the false teaching troubling the Colossian Christians." These things were being tied to visions. When I read this, I think of evangelicals and speaking in tongues or snake handling churches. If you are not speaking in tongues or handling snakes then you are not a true Christian or we are better Christians because we do. Just substitute having visions in for speaking in tongues. It is all wrong.

In verse 19 Paul says, "Don't get caught up in that nonsense. True Christianity is all about worshipping Christ." Then Paul makes a reference to Christ as the head and the church as the body, just as he told them in Colossians 1:18, *"He (Jesus) is the head of the body, the church."*

He finishes verse 19 with Jesus holding the church together. Jesus is the foundation of the church. If any church teaches anything but salvation through Jesus as the Christ, it will not stand. It says in this verse that a church *"grows as God nourishes it."* Why do churches fail? Because they do not teach

salvation through Jesus and they are not teaching the Word of God so God will not bless it so it will not grow.

What kind of nourishment does Jesus provide? Read John 6:35 and John 4:13. Jesus is the Bread of Life and the Living Water.

20 Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: 21 “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? 22 These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

In continuing with Jesus is all you need for salvation, in verse 20 Paul says that we spiritually died with Christ. Galatians 2:20 says that we *“crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

To say what Paul said in verse 20 a different way. “If you have claimed the salvation that comes from Christ alone, then why are you concerned about the rules or the Law.” He is not saying let’s go out and break laws. He is saying do what Jesus would do. Live as Christ lived. Live by Christ and not by legalism.

When people think of Christianity, they think of verse 21. If you are a Christian, you should do this or that. They believe that it is a religion of laws or rules. They don’t think of it as a religion based on love. If you love God and others, then it changes the way that you care about others. Think about it. You love everyone as yourself and you love God enough to hand over control.

Remember what Jesus said were the two most important commandments in Matthew 22:37-40, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”* Jesus motivation was love and so should ours. Our filter should be “If I do what I want, will it be showing love to God or others?”

“Do not... do not... do not: This is a perfect description of legalistic religion, defined more by what we *don’t do* than by what we *do*. Christianity is a moral religion; it does have clear moral boundaries. But at its foundation, Christianity is a religion of *positive action*.”

Verse 22 says that if we are living worldly lives then we and the other things of this world are important. When we accept Jesus as our savior then these things are no longer important. Jesus said

that we are to store up things in Heaven and put no importance on worldly things that can be stolen, rot or destroyed.

Paul says in the last two verses of this chapter that everything that he has taught them in this chapter are rules created by men and are no help in fighting off your sinful nature. The Jews took the 10 commandments and created 600+ laws from them. They used these laws, like doing no work on the Sabbath to entrap Jesus. The Jews had laws that were not viewed as useful by Jesus or Paul.

Finally, Corinthians 5:17 says, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”* When we accepted Jesus as our Savior, we are a new person in Him. Our old person was focused on self but our new person should be filtering everything by WWJD. If someone tries to say, “You can’t go to Heaven if you . . .”, see what the Bible says and filter it through WWJD.