

June 8, 2008

Colossians 2:1-5

Alright good morning. I'm glad you are here – I hope you have your Bibles with you. Let's go back to the book of Colossians together. This morning we will begin chapter 2. And although there is a chapter break here, this is basically a continuation from the end of chapter 1 – from what we saw last week. So let's begin with **verses 1 to 5** of chapter 2.

- 1 *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.*

In verse 1 Paul writes of how he was struggling – which again is a form of the word we saw back in verse 29 of chapter 1 – **Struggling is from the root of our word for agony and it has built into it the idea of a STRENUOUS activity. The particular struggle that Paul had in mind appears to have been that of PRAYER.** When he wrote these words he was basically under house arrest – constantly held by a chain linking him to a Roman soldier. But even under those circumstances, he could engage in the combat of prayer and exert himself strenuously in behalf of his readers.

He says He is praying for you – the Colossians – as well as the Laodiceans and for all who had not met him personally. The city of Colossae was one of three cities we talked about when we first started the study of this book along with Laodicea and another one in a river valley that developed churches not because Paul himself had been there, but because others had come and heard Paul preach, embraced the gospel, and then took that message home with them. And Paul says he is struggling for these fellow believers. Why?

Well verse two has an incredible cycle of purpose in it that we'll try to take apart and look at and then put it back together right quick. Stay with me as we go through it, because it will be crucial for us before we're finished today.

He says his purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart. The basic meaning of the word for **encouraged here – parakaleo – is “to call ALONGSIDE.”** But because a person can be called alongside for many reasons, the word has a wide range of meanings and uses which include the idea of comfort and encouragement. But **in this context the word encouragement is probably best understood as “STRENGTHEN” because the Colossians remember were being attacked by false teachers and needed strengthening more than comfort.**

And when we read this phrase – that they may be encouraged or strengthened in heart – we see the word heart and our present day understanding goes to our emotions – our feelings. And that's natural – nothing wrong with that, but the biblical writers associated the emotions with something different. Basically the Hebrew idea of emotions was seated in the gut – down deep in your stomach. In fact, many of the actual translations would use the word bowels. They did so because strong emotions produce physical reactions in the lower part of the abdomen. Even today when we get nervous we say we have butterflies in the stomach. The abstract concept of emotions was viewed in terms of the concrete physical effects they produced.

So when Paul used the word **“heart” here, it usually is more general and refers to the inner person, the center of life, most specifically to the MIND.** In **Jeremiah 17:9** the Bible says “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” and refers to the

heart as a thinking faculty. **Proverbs 53:1** says “The fools says in his heart “there is no God.” Again, using the heart to refer to the mind – to where thinking takes place – to where responsibility comes from.

So when Paul says his purpose is that they may be encouraged in their hearts he is hoping that they would be strengthened in what they **KNOW to be true** – basically everything he has written so far – everything we have been talking about – for example.

And then verse 2 says encouraged in heart “and united in love.” Now the NIV puts this as another purpose – and again there is nothing wrong with that, it doesn’t misuse the text in any way – but in the Greek that Paul wrote this in, this is a participle. Now I have no interest in giving us a grammar lesson here so don’t fade out on me, but **by using a participle form of “united” Paul is giving the MEANS by which the encouraging – the strengthening – takes place.** Their hearts are encouraged – the minds are strengthened – by being united together in love. In other words – **by taking what they know and putting it into action – by living it – by LOVING each other – by serving each other – which naturally builds unity with each other.**

And Paul goes on in this process in verse 2 and says that he wants their being united in love to encourage their hearts “so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding.”

“Complete understanding” is much like we “wisdom” last week in verse 29. It **refers to applying biblical PRINCIPLES to every day life.** And Paul describes having that ability as having **“the full riches” – that this is an AWESOME & desirable thing – he wants this reality in each of these believers.**

Now let me stop here and put this together for us – this is an awesome circle or cycle of truth. Paul is praying and struggling so that the Colossians and Laodiceans and everyone who has not met him personally – that they might be strong in their minds – strong in what they know to be true – all that they have been rightly taught about Jesus and His truth – and that that strengthening would happen as they actually put what they know into practice – as they act in love towards each other which further has the effect of uniting them together as one. And the result of that is that they have the full riches of complete understanding – they realize the value and wonder and awesomeness of applying the truth to life and that’s what becomes real to them.

You with me so far? Nod your heads if you’re with me.

See here’s the biblical principle behind what Paul is praying for here. Truth that you and I know in our minds (what Paul calls our hearts) that is then worked out into our lives in love for other believers – when you actually have to act on what you know, putting your faith in it, putting it to the test – results in deep conviction in our lives – it becomes something that we actually base our lives on, something that is not just undeniably true but is undeniably real to you.

Let me simply it for us and for your notes. **Once you receive the truth in your mind and it is worked out in love for other believers in your life, the result will be a settled CONVICTION that what you believe is really true.**

That was basically the theme of the Truth Project we did on Sunday nights this Spring – the question it posed was “Do you really believe that what you believe is really true?” That’s what Paul is after in verse 2.

And as that process happens over and over in their lives and in our lives, something else results from that. Paul prays for that process to happen because it is necessary for the next part. He says, “in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ.”

Folks that just makes sense. **The more we take the words of Christ** – the promises of Christ – the example of Christ – the teachings of Christ **and put them into action and by doing so find**

them to be true, the more we realize and become confident in – the more we know – that Jesus is WHO He says He is and will do what He PROMISED to do.

And there is one more link in this chain. I know – that’s a lot already – but as we grow in knowledge of the mystery of God, namely Christ, we realize what Paul says at the end of verse 3: that in him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” When he says “hidden” there that doesn’t mean we have to poke around in the dark to find them, it means they are **hidden – unknown – to those who aren’t CHRISTIANS** – who haven’t embraced Jesus by faith – who are making no effort to live in the process he just described. But to those who have and who are, these treasures are readily available to all. And that’s important in the context of the letter specifically because remember that’s what the false teachers were arguing against. They claimed that through their relationship with a supposed hierarchy of supernatural beings that they possessed a higher wisdom and knowledge than these ordinary believers who only believed in Jesus. And the fact that the Colossians were facing those kind of lies is why Paul continues in verse 4. Look at it again with me.

He says, “I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.” We will dig more in detail at this admonition in the next couple of weeks as we get to verse 8 but for now realize that **the arguments the Colossians were getting hit with centered around two things: that Jesus wasn’t GOD and that Jesus wasn’t enough for SALVATION.**

Do those two things sound familiar? They should. That is exactly what Paul has been hammering home through chapter 1 and that’s why he prays with such fervency for the process we looked at. Because the outcome of the process is that they know, they grasp, they are convinced of the truth of Jesus. Which is what he encourages them about in verse 5. Look at it again: “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.”

Now without going into too much detail here, **both the words in Greek for order – taxis – and firm – stereoma – are MILITARY words.** Taxis referred to a line of soldiers all drawn up for battle and stereoma referred to the solidarity of a formation of soldiers. So taken together like this, **they express Paul’s joy that individually and collectively the Colossians were STANDING FIRM against these attacks of false teachings.** He wants them to continue – to remain settled in their present true understanding and not yield to doubt from those attacks.

So basically Paul uses a little psychology here. He knows they are at risk because Epaphras has come all the way from Colossae to Rome to see Paul in prison to tell him about these false teachers and their lies. So by telling them “good job – I’m proud of you” – **by encouraging them he INSPIRES them to continue and maybe even do better in the days to come.** He’s saying basically – hold on to Jesus – I know you can do it – just hold on to Jesus. And he will do more of that in more detail in verses 6 and 7 next week.

Now exhale with me. I know that was a lot of explanation- in fact this passage is probably the most twisty turny of the book so far. I mean verse 2 and 3 alone just go in continuous causal circles like this..... But I don’t want you to get lost in the explanation. So let me just pull out a few things – again there are more in there for God to reveal to you – but let me point out three.

First of all, when you read these 5 verses all together, you cannot miss the fact that Paul loved these people, can you? I mean his passion is just dripping from his pen. And I want you to realize something. Paul has this emotion – this passion – not just as a simple personal love nor just as a concern about some people he likes a lot. He has this agony over people that he’s never even met! Why? Because he loves the church – not just the churches he planted – not just the ones that bear his name – but the Church anywhere. God help us have that kind of love. That’s a perspective we need to cultivate. **Instead of bickering and being proud and rejoicing over the failures of other**

believers, we ought to have the same agony – the same STRUGGLE in our own hearts over those believers who are missing out on the full life that God would have for them. And that should transfer from an individual level to a corporate level. Paul wanted the church of God to do well and succeed and grow everywhere – even when it wasn't because of him. There was no attitude of competition – there was just a desire for the glory of God and the name of Jesus to be held up. That is extremely rare today.

You know the group of pastors I meet with in May each year are unbelievably diverse. About half planted their own churches; the other half went into established churches. About half are in smaller cities or suburbs and half are in larger metropolitan areas. Our churches range in number from around a hundred to over 4000. Our programs are different. Our staffs are different. Our buildings are different. The only things we have in common is that we all preach verse by verse, we all have a high view of the Scripture, and we all went to Texas A&M. But what makes this group unique is that no one there feels better or less than anyone else. Numbers and budgets are never even brought up. Every single pastor there wants every single pastor there and every church represented there to succeed and we will all do anything we can to help each other do that. Folks **we have got to learn to love the body of Christ, not just our PART of it.** That doesn't mean you love those you do life with here any less – it just means you understand that we are part of a bigger picture that includes every Jesus-proclaiming, Bible-believing congregation out there and **it will take all of us to be who Christ wants the Church to be.**

And a resulting part of that perspective is also challenging this morning. What was Paul doing for this church? He was praying – seriously struggling in intense effort – praying. And folks it is my guess today that the vast majority of us here today have no idea what that is like. We may pray when we get in trouble – we may pray in times of decision – we may even pray for someone else if they ask us to for a specific reason. But the kind of serious prayer Paul is talking about here for each other is mainly absent from our lives. And that is something that God wants to change. **God wants you and me to be people who struggle in PRAYER on behalf of our family of God.** You say I don't know what to pray. Pray by name and pray what Paul prayed here. That they might be strengthened in their minds – that they might live what they believe in love – that they might know the joy of living according to God's Word – that they might know Jesus better & better – pray for God's glory in their lives.

Along those lines, the second application I want us to see here is that **when you battles with doubt – with a lack of confidence – with worry – the problem is most likely NOT that you need to know more but that you need to put what you know into PRACTICE.** Remember our minds are strengthened because we live out what we know in love towards others which creates a conviction in our life that Jesus is who He says He is and will do what He promised. And when that becomes a settled conviction in us, then worry and doubt and fear begin to fade away in light of the truth.

Just like we saw last week in Philippians 4:9 where Paul said whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice and the God of peace will be with you. Take the truth in your head – put it into your life – and you'll know Jesus more. In fact, **the strength of your relationships with Christ is in direct proportion to how much you LIVE by what He says.**

The more we live in obedience day after day, step by step like our vision says – life in Christ one step at a time changed by belief into obedience – the closer we will be to Jesus and the more real He will be to us. But the opposite is also true. We're not going to know or experience Jesus when we spend our days doing less than or often the opposite of what He says. Again – **you can say you believe whatever you want – but if we aren't living it, we don't BELIEVE it.**

Lastly today, hear what Paul says in all of this. Hold onto Jesus. The two truths that will be attacked every time are exactly what the Colossians faced – that Jesus isn't God and Jesus isn't enough for salvation. When Jehovah's Witnesses tell you Jesus isn't God. When Mormons tell you Jesus isn't

enough for salvation. When Muslims tell you Jesus isn't God. When Hindus and Buddhists and even Catholics say that salvation takes something more than or different than Jesus. Hold on to Jesus. Don't be deceived by fine-sounding arguments. And remember that all this ties into last week. Not only are we to hold on to Jesus in the face of attacks – we are to proclaim Him. **Hold ONTO Jesus for you and hold OUT Jesus for everyone else.** Admonish and teach every chance you get. Pray fervently all the time. Do both out of love because Christ in you – the Christ who is God – the Christ who saves – Christ in you wants the people around you to know Him, too. Amen?

Love the church

Pray for each other

Live the truth

Hold on to and hold out Jesus every chance you get

Let's pray.