

SEEKING JESUS CHRIST
(SUNDAY, JANUARY 11, 2015)

Scripture Reading: Prov. 2:1-9; Col. 2:1-5

INTRODUCTION

What are some of the dangers that individual Christians and local churches face?

Consider several of the dangers and threats that we see commonly today.

Emotionalism – no solid truth, anchored in feeling and emotion. Superficial.

Heresy – little or no concern for truth, embracing what is popular or “scientific.”

Formalism – on the surface things appear to be solid and faithful, but most of what takes place is simply going through the motions.

How do we keep from falling into these dangers and others?

There must be a sincere focus on the Lord Jesus Christ and a desire to grow in love and knowledge.

The dangers we face may not be identical to what Christians in Colossae and the surrounding region were facing, but what you and I are called to do and be is the same.

We will look at Colossians 2:1-5 in 5 parts.

- 1) Paul’s great conflict, v. 1
- 2) Four desires for the church, v. 2
- 3) Christ is the source of all wisdom, v. 3
- 4) Danger of deception, v. 4
- 5) Rejoicing in order and steadfastness, v. 5

Seek after the wisdom and knowledge found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. PAUL’S GREAT CONFLICT, V. 1

Col. 2:1 For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,

The opening words of verse 1 can be compared to Romans 1:13.

Rom. 1:13 Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.

Here in verse 1 Paul seeks to communicate to those in Colossae and the surrounding region concerning his focused and exhausting ministry for them.

The word conflict is related the verb striving in 1:29.

As we observed and as I emphasized last week, all true service for Jesus Christ involves sacrifice and inconvenience. There is nothing that we can say is easy if it involves true service for Jesus Christ.

If you look at the lives of those who are some of the greatest Christians, what they have in common is not necessarily intellectual brilliance but a willingness to give of themselves for others.

What is significant here is that Paul's struggle was for those he had never even met.

There were two other cities relatively close to Colossae. Hierapolis was about 15 miles away. Laodicea was about 20 miles from Colossae.

Though Paul spent nearly three years not far away in Ephesus, he was not the one who directly established the local churches in these cities.

And yet Paul could honestly speak of a great conflict – a great agony that he endured for their sake.

Besides our own family and close friends, can we really speak of a great struggle on behalf of others, especially those that we may have never even met?

Now, as I mentioned last week, none of us are apostles or have identically the same ministry and calling as Paul.

This does not mean that we are exempt from any struggle or striving in our service.

What was Paul's great conflict for these believers?

Col. 4:12 uses a related verb translated as laboring fervently to speak of prayer.

Col. 1:9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

Paul's conflict could also be explained in terms of his sincere love for those in Colossae and the great thought that went into this letter he wrote to them.

In a more broad sense, Paul could speak of his entire exhausting ministry which was for the sake of the body of Christ, the church.

Is there a great struggle or conflict that you have directed to the service of Jesus Christ for others?

2. FOUR DESIRES FOR THE CHURCH, V. 2

2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,

Verse 2 describes four goals or desires that Paul had for those in Colossae.

First: that their hearts may be encouraged.

Some would suggest that in this context **strengthened** would be a better translation.¹

Peter O'Brien writes:

In Colossians there is no mention of, or allusion to, distresses or persecutions that would have elicited consolation or comfort as the object of the apostle's energetic activities. What made Paul concerned was the readers' danger of being carried away by the heretical teaching.²

You need strength to serve the Lord Jesus Christ; we need strengthened hearts to resist the spiritual dangers that are always present.

The word heart doesn't just refer to our emotions but our entire inner life – mind, will, emotions, affections, and conscience.

Heb. 3:13 but exhort (*same verb*) one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

The second goal: knit together in love.

¹ See the comments of O'Brien which Harris references.

² Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians–Philemon* (WBC 44; Accordance/Thomas Nelson Electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 93.

Eph. 3:17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

Isn't this such a beautiful description of what we should also desire?

If we are together part of the body of Christ, then how could any other description than true love characterize us?

Love, not in some sappy or simply emotional way, is the foundation of the Christian life.

Love not as the world defines it, but as demonstrated in the life of our Lord and His commands to us.

The third goal: attaining to all the riches of the full assurance of understanding.

This is a very dense statement isn't it?

Having understanding of God's truth leads to assurance or certainty and this can only be described as something very valuable.

Prov. 3:13-14 Happy is the man who finds wisdom, And the man who gains understanding; For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, And her gain than fine gold.

The fourth goal is the ultimate purpose: to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ.

There are some differences in Greek manuscripts which are reflected in slightly different translations of this verse in common Bible versions.

Let us try to make this rich statement more clear.

Last week from the end of chapter 1, we saw the word mystery.

Mystery refers to how God would bring salvation to all the nations and bring true unity to Jew and Gentile.

How would God gloriously fulfill His covenant promises to Abraham in such a way to bring blessing to all the nations?

This glorious theme found many times throughout the OT is only fully explained in the NT.

Paul desires that the Colossians will come to full understanding and conviction of the glorious plan of salvation found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

John Calvin wrote here:

“Hence all that think that they know anything of God apart from Christ, contrive to themselves an idol in the place of God; as also, on the other hand, that man is ignorant of Christ, who is not led by him to the Father, and who does not in him embrace God wholly. In the mean time, it is a memorable passage for proving Christ’s divinity, and the unity of his essence with the Father.”

**3. CHRIST IS THE SOURCE OF ALL
WISDOM, v. 3**

3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

The whom clearly refers here to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hidden doesn’t mean something that is kept from view but has the meaning of the place where something is deposited.

All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Does this mean that if you know Jesus Christ, you will know everything about every subject?

No, of course not!

But it does mean that a proper knowledge of Jesus Christ is essential for any area of study.

Notice how Paul speaks together of knowledge and wisdom. I don’t know that we can easily divide up these two – they are joined together.

One way of understanding wisdom and knowledge together to know what you believe and why you believe it and what you reject as false and why you don’t believe it.

For many years as a church, by God’s grace alone, we have recognized what this means for education.

Can there be any true education without an understanding of Jesus Christ?

No!

It is not that people have no knowledge or ability. It is not that all people are intellectually stupid.

But if you remove Jesus Christ, then you have removed the most important foundation for learning.

And doing this comes with an incredible cost!

Think of how much money and effort are wasted in our nation because Jesus Christ has been removed as the basis for learning and instruction.

The Illinois Family Institute and others were sharing a story this past week how in San Francisco, CA four schools over the last four years have been teaching students Transcendental Meditation or TM.³

TM is one of the most popular Hollywood religions promoted by Clint Eastwood, Ellen DeGeneres, Jerry Seinfeld and a host of others.

How can government schools be teaching students repackaged Hinduism?

You can do this when it is claimed that it is a scientific method for relieving stress. Just ignore the fact that TM is connected with praying to various Hindu gods.

Now, we are not just talking about simplistically just saying that Jesus is the answer, but seeking to think critically about the complex issues we face today not based on our own understanding.

Jesus Christ as the foundation of all wisdom and knowledge means that His Word is the starting point.

Jesus Christ as the foundation of all wisdom and knowledge means that you must be in right relationship with Him.

Quoting here John Calvin:

“For what is the reason why mankind have involved themselves in so many wicked opinions, in so many idolatries, in so many foolish speculations, but this — that, despising the simplicity of the gospel, they have ventured to aspire higher? All the errors, accordingly, that are in Popery, must be reckoned as proceeding from this ingratitude — that, not resting satisfied with Christ alone, they have given themselves up to strange doctrines.”

³ <http://www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/san-francisco-schools-transformed-power-meditation-n276301>

4. THE DANGER OF DECEPTION, V. 4

Col. 2:4 Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.

Here Paul for the first time speaks of the danger facing the Christians in Colossae and the surrounding region.

What Paul has just shared with them was also for the purpose of warning them about deception through persuasive words.

Both the verb deceive and the word translated as persuasive words are built on the Greek word, *logos*. Deception comes through words.

Many people in the ancient world were trained and very skilled in the art of persuasive speech.

It is possible that there was a specific person who was causing trouble for the Colossian church and in the region, but we don't know much about the danger except what we find in Colossians.

Scripture both speaks of being deceived by others as we see here and also self-deception.

James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

How do we understand how people who at one time professed the truth are led into all sorts of theological error?

What we can say in simple agreement with this passage is that people have been deceived and led away in some form away from Jesus Christ.

Although they may claim still to love and follow Jesus Christ, they follow a belief that teaches something more is needed than the righteousness of Jesus Christ. They have been deceived into thinking that other wisdom than what is found in the Word of God is necessary.

Sadly what we can observe is that sometimes it is very intelligent people who are led astray. We say, they should know better.

The point is that simply intellectual brilliance is not a defense.

You must constantly seek after the wisdom and knowledge found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The other danger we all must be keen to recognize is not simply Mormons knocking on your door, but the constant distractions of this age – entertainment, sports, technological gadgets and the like.

Many are led astray simply by being led to distraction and spiritual slumber. Lost in spiritual dreamland they have no clue where they are heading nor do they really care.

5. REJOICING IN ORDER AND STEADFASTNESS, V. 5

5 For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your *good* order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

As we have already observed, Paul never had visited the Colossian church and could not visit them at this time because of his house arrest.

Paul here speaks of being with the Colossians in spirit.

Similar language is found in 1 Cor. 5:3.

1 Cor. 5:3 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed.

How was Paul present in spirit?

Certainly Paul prayed for them and they were often in his thoughts. But more is suggested.

Others have supposed that Paul was present because he had a “charismatic personality.”

The best suggestion is that Paul considered himself present in spirit because the Spirit of God has united both him and the Colossians to Christ. **He is present in spirit with them because both live with Christ.**⁴

His love and care for them did not depend upon him being with them physically.

Though Paul recognized the danger the Colossians faced, he could also speak of the good order and steadfastness of their faith in Christ.

These two terms can have a military meaning, but I don't think that helps us understand what Paul is saying here.

⁴ Peter T. O'Brien, 98.

Good order speaks of the unity of the church and how it was functioning as a local congregation.

Steadfastness speaks of the resolve of their faith and living in terms of faith.

Such a testimony should also be our desire!

May God also show us where we are not functioning as we should as part of the body of Christ.

May God also strengthen us where we are weak.

The testimony of verse 5 also should be of great encouragement.

Despite being a relatively young church, despite the dangers of false teaching, it is by God's grace possible to endure all of these difficulties and bear a true witness.

We well recognize the countless heresies and faults present in so much of the visible church in our own nation and through much of the world.

Should this cause us to despair that there is no hope?

Should we embrace the idea that there is no hope of true reformation and revival?

Certainly not!

We may not see all that we long for, but rather than just navel gaze or complain, we seek to make sure we are seeking after our Lord and devoting ourselves tirelessly to His church and His purposes.

CONCLUSION:

Seek after the wisdom and knowledge found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

John 15:9-17

Prayer

Hymn: In Christ Alone

Benediction – 1 Peter 5:8-11

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all

grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*. To Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.