

Series: Colossians – Christ Above All

Title: “The Christian’s Stability in a World Gone Mad” (Colossians 1:10)

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/9/2009

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Introduction

Today, the Lord willing, we’re going to finish our consideration of Colossians chapter one, verse ten. And as we begin today, let me remind you once again that the Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is doing something here that he does so often in his letters to the various churches. Everything that Paul writes follows this kind of pattern. There’s an order, and a structure, and a logic in all of Paul’s epistles. Everything that he says is preparing the way for the next thing.

And that’s exactly what he’s doing here in the first chapter of Colossians. Paul is putting a framework in place for the Colossian believers of the first century, and for us two thousand years later. The framework that’s he’s putting up is moving us toward one of the most powerful expositions on the person and work of Jesus Christ that we find anywhere in the Bible.

And here’s the framework that Paul has been putting up so far in chapter one. He’s reminded them in verse one that he writes to the Colossian believers as an apostle, with the authority of Jesus Christ. And beginning in verse two, he reminds them that the Gospel of Christ has changed everything for them – they’ve been lifted up out of paganism and brought into new life in Christ. The Gospel is bearing fruit among them – love for all the saints. They know and are experiencing

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the grace of God in truth. And they have a hope laid up in Heaven for them – the settled certainty of eternal life with Jesus Christ.

And then as he moves on into verses nine through twelve, Paul is encouraging them by letting them know that he is praying for them, that they might walk worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Keep in mind that the Colossian believers were surrounded by paganism and humanism, just as we are today. And in those days of the first century, the pagans considered it to be an important thing to render worship that was worthy of the deities to whom they were devoted. In fact, archaeologists have found inscriptions on pagan temples that spoke of this, and exhorted people to do it. And of course, much of the pagan worship was corrupt and immoral.

But Paul is saying, now that you Colossian believers have been delivered from all of that, you need to walk worthy, not of these false pagan deities to which you were once devoted, but you need to walk worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ, the true and living God. You need to live a life that is worthy of being identified with Him. Your life needs to be completely different from the life that you lived before. You need to render true obedience to Him.

And in verse nine, Paul says that the key to this is to “be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” And in verse ten, Paul emphasizes this once again. Christians are to “walk worthy of the Lord,

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fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.”

Growing *Into* the Knowledge of God

And today, we’re going to focus on that last phrase of Colossians chapter one and verse ten. In the original Greek of the New Testament, that phrase is actually better translated, “growing into the knowledge of God.” “Growing into the knowledge of God.”

It’s the same kind of a picture you have with the clothing of a child while the child is growing up. When you have a new baby, you never buy clothes that are just the size that the infant is right now. You know that your baby is going to grow. And so you buy that sleeper or that playsuit a little bigger, because you say, “Oh, he’s going to grow into it.” And he does – quickly.

And when children get to be school age, at the beginning of the school year you buy pants and shirts and shoes and dresses that are a little on the large side. The pants may be a little long at the start. The shoes may be a little bit big. But you say, once again, “Oh, they’ll grow into them.” And so they do – often more quickly than the parents wish they would! Sometimes those pants that hung down over the boy’s shoes in September are way up above their ankles by March or April! And as the infant becomes a child, as the child becomes a teenager, and as the teenager becomes an adult, there’s that continual process of growing.

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And so it is for us as believers. The knowledge of God is like a garment we put on that’s way too big for us. And we need to continue to grow into it. But you know, the interesting thing is that for a Christian, that growing process never stops. The knowledge of God is a garment that you could never possibly grow into. The knowledge of God is so vast, and deep, and wide, and high that you could spend a hundred lifetimes growing in your knowledge of God, and you would still have an incredible amount of growing yet to do.

The Apostle Paul speaks of this in Romans chapter 11, verses 33 and 34: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?’ ‘Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?’ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”

In the time remaining today, I want to bring to your attention five important things that we find here in Colossians and elsewhere in the Word of God, about this matter of growing into the knowledge of God.

The Christian’s Knowledge is Unique

First of all, the Christian’s knowledge is unique. It is entirely different from the world’s knowledge. It has an entirely different basis. I’ve made this point as we

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looked at verse nine several messages back, but I want to emphasize it once again because the Apostle Paul by the Holy Spirit emphasizes it here once again.

The Christian’s knowledge is not the speculative knowledge of human philosophers or the mystical knowledge of false religions – even the false knowledge that is taught by counterfeit versions of Christianity.

The word for knowledge once again here in Colossians 1:10, as in the preceding verse, is not *gnosis*, mere general knowledge, but *epignosis* – precise and correct knowledge; real knowledge; true knowledge; confirmed knowledge; tested knowledge; knowledge that conveys understanding, not merely the accumulation of facts without a true understanding of the significance of those facts.

Romans 1:28 says that, in contrast to this, unbelievers do not even like to retain God in their knowledge. The sense of the original Greek is that the unbelieving mind has tested God against the false standard of human wisdom, and the human mind has declared that it rejects God – God doesn’t meet my intellectual standards. And so, in that same verse in Romans, Paul says that God has given unbelievers over to a reprobate mind. In the original language, the sense is that God has given them over to the control of a mind that would not even meet the test of measuring up to the purpose for which a mind was meant.

Someone once said that a mind is a terrible thing to waste, and that is exactly what the unbeliever does by rejecting God. Our minds, our thinking, were meant to

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glorify God and to seek to know Him. But the sinful mind rejects God, and goes after anything and everything else that calls itself wisdom, rather than seeking after the true wisdom that is found in the knowledge of God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Knowledge of Jesus Christ: The Distinctive Mark of the Christian

What Paul is saying here in Colossians 1:10 is that the Christian mind is to be the complete opposite of the worldly mind. And this brings me to a second point: Knowledge of Jesus Christ is the distinctive mark of the Christian.

John chapter one, verse 18 tells us that Jesus Christ exegetes the Father to us. John writes, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” And the word for “declared” in the original is *exegesis*. Jesus Christ has exegeted the Father for us. He has revealed Him to us. He has provided detailed information about Him. He has made Him fully known to us. Knowledge of God the Father comes through knowledge of Jesus Christ.

And this was Paul’s own goal. In Philippians chapter three, beginning at verse seven, Paul says, “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own

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righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”

And likewise, the knowledge of God that is found in Jesus Christ was Paul’s goal for the Colossians. In Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse one, he says, “For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea...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, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

Knowledge of Jesus Christ: The Christian’s Stability in a World Gone Mad

This brings us to a third point about the Christian’s knowledge of God. Knowledge of Jesus Christ is the Christian’s stability in a world that has gone spiritually insane. We see this in Ephesians chapter four, beginning at verse eleven, where we read that God has given to the church faithful apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers, “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect (or mature) man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be

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children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying (that is, the building up) of itself in love.”

Paul repeats this thought in Philippians chapter one, beginning at verse nine: “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent,” – that is, things that are superior and worthy and valuable – “that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

Knowledge of Jesus Christ: The Foundation of Good Works & Godly Living

And this, in turn, brings us to a fourth point. Knowledge of Jesus Christ is the foundation of good works and godly living. Paul is going to get very specific and practical about this as we move into Colossians chapters 3 and 4. For example, we find this in Colossians 3:9 and 10: “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.”

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In Titus 1:1, Paul speaks of “the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness.”

Peter speaks of the same thing at the beginning of his second epistle. Second Peter chapter one beginning at verse two: “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the **knowledge** of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the **knowledge** of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the **knowledge** of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And later on, in chapter two, verse 16, Peter reminds believers that we have “escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

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Knowledge of Jesus Christ: The Christian’s Primary Pursuit

Knowledge of Jesus Christ is the foundation of everything for the Christian. And because that is true, point number five, you as a Christian, need to eagerly pursue proficiency in your knowledge of Jesus Christ.

You need to be ready to listen to what God’s Word has to say; you need to have a teachable spirit. This is an area in which your need to make progress never stops as long as you live. You can never be at a standstill in your knowledge of God. You can never say, “I’ve arrived – I know enough, I don’t need to learn any more.” You can never say, “My knowledge of God is superior to other people’s knowledge of God – I know enough, I don’t need to learn any more.”

Notice what Paul says later on in Colossians chapter one, beginning at verse 27: “...Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” Paul is saying here that every Christian needs to be warned. Every Christian needs to be taught. And the goal of this is so that every Christian may be presented perfect, that is, mature, in Christ Jesus. No exceptions. There are no spiritual elites in the kingdom of God. We all need to grow into the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ.

And obedience to the knowledge of God that you have already received is therefore a necessary ingredient for the reception, assimilation, and application of

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further knowledge of God. If you are not of a teachable mind and heart, you cannot progress in your knowledge of God or of His will. Your heart attitude needs to be the same as that of David in Psalm 25, verses 4 and 5: “Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day.”

Conclusion

If you are a Christian today, your number one task is to grow into the knowledge of God. Here, dear friend, are deep riches. Deeper than anything the world can offer. And so I ask you this question today: Are you growing into the knowledge of God, by growing in your knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, by growing in your knowledge of the Bible, the written Word of God?

And if you are not a believer in Christ today, do you understand that you need to know God by coming to know Jesus Christ? I invite you to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin, right now. Acknowledge before God today that you are a sinner, that you have broken God’s holy law, that you are lost and without hope on your own. Receive the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who died for sinners, who shed His blood in order that hopeless sinners might have eternal life. Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal life. Repent of your sins – and that involves a change in your thinking – place your faith in Christ alone for eternal life, and

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begin living a life that is pleasing to Him by growing into the knowledge of God, by reading and studying His Word.

And if you have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior today, we would love to hear from you. We want to help you understand more about the Bible and about the Christian life. And if you don't have a Bible, we would be glad to send you one. So please listen for our contact information in a few moments at the end of the program.

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