

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "The Pillar of Knowledge of the Mystery of God"

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/26/2010

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## **Paul's Great Statement on Christian Unity**

I want to focus our attention once more on the Apostle Paul's great statement about Christian unity that we find in Colossians chapter two, verses one through three. Paul wrote these words to the Colossian church nearly two thousand years ago, but they apply just as much to us as believers today:

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, 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. (Colossians 2:1-3)

Now as we have seen in our last several messages, we find four pillars of Christian unity in these verses. We have considered the first three of them in detail up to this point, and today we are going to focus on the last of them. Let me state all four of them for you once more:

*First, there is the pillar of facts.* Christianity is a matter of the heart, but it is not a matter of mere feelings. Our feelings are most certainly involved, our emotions are involved. But the place of feelings and emotions in the Christian life must be that of a response. Paul says, "that their hearts may be encouraged" – a response to facts, a response to God's Word. Feelings and emotions must not be the driving

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force in our lives. God's Word must be. Our emotions fluctuate, often our emotions become sinful, and sometimes our emotions can mislead us. But God's Word will never mislead us.

The Christian faith is above all a matter of facts, of knowledge, of reasoned belief in the things that God's Word tells us. And God's Word, used by the indwelling Holy Spirit, is the thing that renovates our minds so that we will think God's thoughts. It redirects our will away from following after the god of this world. And God's Word and God's Spirit place within us a new resolve, to walk worthy of Christ, to walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. This is what we mean by the pillar of facts.

*Secondly, there is the pillar of love.* We have seen in previous messages that the love of which Paul speaks here is *agape* love, self-sacrificial love. John says that we love Christ because He first loved us. We are to cultivate love for Christ. And we are to cultivate love for the body of Christ, because every believer is precious in His sight, and therefore every believer must be precious in our site. So there is firstly the pillar of facts, and secondly the pillar of love.

*Thirdly, there is the pillar of understanding.* This is the third thing that unites Christians. We saw in our last message that the word for understanding in the Greek literally means, "to bring together in the mind." To bring together in the mind. Paul is saying that you as a Christian are to use your mind, you are to use your intelligence, guided by the Holy Spirit, to bring together the various aspects of the

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things that God's Word reveals to the Christian about His general will. And then you are to bring that combined knowledge of Scripture to bear upon the specific situations and problems that you confront, in your own personal life, your family life, the workplace, the life of the church – anywhere, and everywhere. So we have the pillar of facts, the pillar of love, and the pillar of understanding.

And fourthly and lastly, there is the pillar of knowledge.

### **The Fourth Pillar of Christian Unity**

So today I want to focus your attention on what Paul has to say about this fourth pillar of Christian unity, the pillar of knowledge. Remember that we saw in our last message that the words "knit together" here at the beginning of Colossians chapter two apply to everything Paul is talking about. Based on facts, not mere feelings, Christians are to be knit together in love, we are to be knit together in understanding, and we are to be knit together in knowledge.

What kind of knowledge is Paul talking about? In verses two and three he puts it this way: "Being knit together...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."

In the original language, and in the context, this is an extremely weighty statement. Paul is saying some tremendous things. And he's really setting the stage, now, for everything else that he's going to have to say in the rest of the book of

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Colossians. Everything that Paul is going to say in the rest of chapter two about the triple threat to the church – the threat of worldly philosophy, the threat of legalism, the threat of man-made doctrines – all of it is going to be based on this. Everything that Paul is going to say about the life of the Christian in the home, in the world, in the workplace, and in the church in chapters three and four – all of it is also going to be based on this. "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."

Now in that statement we find seven things that are true of this knowledge that is to unite all believers in Christ – the knowledge that is to produce like-mindedness, the knowledge that is to produce a consistent way of thinking and acting, among all believers in Christ. Let me list them for you, and then we'll go back and consider each one:

1. The knowledge that unites true believers in Christ is knowledge of a mystery.
2. The knowledge that unites true believers in Christ is hidden or stored-up knowledge.
3. The knowledge that unites true believers in Christ is precious knowledge.
4. The knowledge that unites true believers in Christ is full or comprehensive knowledge.

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5. The knowledge that unites true believers in Christ is accurate or precise knowledge.
6. The knowledge that unites true believers in Christ is complete knowledge.
7. The knowledge that unites true believers in Christ is consistent knowledge.

Knowledge of a mystery. Hidden knowledge. Precious knowledge. Comprehensive knowledge. Precise knowledge. Complete knowledge. Consistent knowledge. Those are the seven characteristics we find here.

### **Seven Characteristics of the Knowledge That Unites True Believers**

So now let's go back and look at each one of these.

*First, the knowledge that unites true believers in Christ is knowledge of a mystery.* What is a mystery in Scripture? A mystery is something that was once hidden, but is later revealed. In this particular case, something that was once hidden, but is now revealed.

What is the mystery that Paul is talking about here? He says it is "knowledge of the mystery of God." What does that mean? The mystery, Paul tells us in chapter one, is Jesus Christ Himself. Chapter one, verse 26 – "the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

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And who is Christ? Paul tells us in chapter one, verse fifteen. He is “the exact representation of the invisible God.” The Christ who lives in you is the exact representation of the invisible God. Jesus Christ, John chapter one verse eighteen tells us, “declares” or exegetes or reveals or explains God the Father to us.

We now know God the Father in a way we could never know Him apart from Jesus Christ. The knowledge that unites true believers is knowledge that is rooted in understanding what the Bible says about God the Father through Jesus Christ. That is the first characteristic of the knowledge that unites believers in Christ.

*Second, the knowledge that unites true believers in Christ is hidden or stored-up knowledge.* Paul says “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” In the original Greek it would actually read more like this: “In God – in both God the Father and in Jesus Christ the Son – are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

The word that is translated “hidden” means that it is knowledge that is secret, or stored up, or hidden away. What Paul is saying is that this is knowledge that the unbeliever does not have. Far too often, I think we operate under the false assumption that unbelievers can comprehend and understand the Bible the same way believers can. Well Paul tells us that is just not true.

In First Corinthians chapter two, verse fourteen Paul says that “the natural man (the unsaved man) does not receive the things of the Spirit of God.” He cannot

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accept them as the truth. Why? "For they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

As you as a believer study the Word of God, guided by the indwelling Spirit of God, you can take it in, you can properly interpret it, in a way that the unbeliever cannot. You can think God's thoughts in a way that the unbeliever cannot. You can therefore do God's will in a way that the unbeliever cannot. That is why the world cannot understand the believer. That is why the world thinks believers are fools, when in fact the believer in Christ is the one who has access to all wisdom. And that is because the knowledge that unites true believers in Christ is hidden knowledge, hidden from the world. They are blind to it. That is the second characteristic of the knowledge that unites believers in Christ – it is hidden knowledge.

### **Don't Be Intimidated by False Intellectualism**

Now, I want to stop before I go on and say some things by way of application. Why does Paul make a point of the fact that this knowledge that unites believers in Christ is, first of all, knowledge of the mystery of God, and second of all, that it is knowledge that is hidden from the natural man?

Well, here again Paul is recapitulating something that he said in chapter one. In this case, he's taking us back to verse nine. Let me read it for you again: "For this reason we also, since the day we heard it [heard of your faith in Christ], do not

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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."

The Greek word that Paul uses for "knowledge" in chapter one, verse nine is *epignosis*, which means not just "knowledge" but "full knowledge." He is saying, my prayer is that you might be filled with full knowledge of the will of God – precise knowledge, correct knowledge, overflowing and abundant knowledge that is not lacking or deficient in any way. That is what is available to you, through God's Word and by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, because you are in Christ and Christ is in you.

And Paul is also using this word knowledge, to draw a contrast in relation to one of the challenges to their faith that the church at Colossae was facing. This was the problem of the influence of worldly philosophers who had brought a heresy into the church called Gnosticism. Gnosticism was a philosophical system that was founded on pagan Greek philosophy. The term Gnosticism comes from the Greek work *gnosis*, which also means "knowledge" but in a more general sense.

The Gnostics were pagan intellectuals. They claimed that they had an exclusive kind of "higher knowledge" that was not available to the common man. Gnosticism said that matter was evil but spirit was good. And therefore, said the Gnostics, God could not have created the material universe. It sounds like a lot of the atheistic evolutionists today who say, "I don't believe in God, because a good God could not have created such an evil world." They don't understand that God created a perfect



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world and man by his sin ruined it. The Gnostics also had a very un-biblical view of Jesus Christ, and their idea of salvation was not salvation from sin, but a philosophical kind of salvation that was only available to an "in group" that possessed "higher knowledge" – so they said – than the Bible.

Some people in the early church were made to feel intimidated or inferior by this, just as many Christians often feel intimidated by the secular humanist intellectuals in our day. But Paul is telling you this: You don't need to feel inferior to these people. They are the ones who lack knowledge. They cannot understand spiritual things because they don't have the indwelling Spirit of God. You do. You can. And so, Paul says, I am praying that you will have not just *gnosis* – not just "knowledge" in a general sense – but *epignosis* – full knowledge, correct knowledge, the knowledge that comes only through God in Christ.

In Him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." This is knowledge that is far superior to anything that the world can offer. This is knowledge that no man can have apart from Christ. This is the knowledge that you need in order to understand the world as it really is, and to understand God as He really is, and to live in this sinful world as it is, for Christ's honor and glory.

### **Don't Be Unequally Yoked, Don't Sell Your Birthright**

This is why there can be no kind of partnership, when it comes to spiritual things, between believers and unbelievers. That is why the Bible calls such a partnership being "unequally yoked together." There is supposed to be a difference between the

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believer and the unbeliever. The true believer and the unbeliever are going in two different directions. The true believer and the unbeliever have totally different agendas. The true believer and the unbeliever have two different sets of interests. That is the way it is, according to God's Word. That is why partnership with unbelievers in political action and social action is disastrous for the church. If you're going in the unbeliever's direction, if you're marching to the unbeliever's agenda, if you're working for the unbeliever's interests, you are not following Christ. You are not operating according to the knowledge of Christ. Let me explain.

The best that the unbeliever can possibly want, or hope for, or work for, is to make this dying world a little bit better place. The unbeliever doesn't understand that this world is passing away. The unbeliever doesn't understand that the vital thing is to be prepared for the life to come. The unbeliever doesn't understand that the only way to be prepared for the life to come is to receive Jesus Christ. The unbeliever doesn't understand that the very nature of this world is that it is under God's curse, and the only way for that curse to be removed forever is for Jesus Christ to come again.

The unbeliever doesn't have that kind of knowledge, that kind of understanding. Christians do. Or at least we should. But a Christian who isn't reading and studying his Bible isn't going to have that knowledge. The preacher who isn't proclaiming the whole counsel of God isn't going to preach that knowledge.

And so what's happening today? Far too many believers are walking in ignorance, they're walking around in spiritual poverty instead of taking in the

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nourishment of the knowledge of God through Christ and His Word – and acting on it. And so the church lacks wisdom. The church lacks unity. The church forgets its mission. And the church goes off and does what the world wants it to do, instead of doing what God wants it to do.

That is tragic. The church being unequally yoked together with the world. The church selling its birthright to the world, instead of walking in knowledge and doing what Christ commands. Joining with the world in all kinds of causes, all kinds of things that the world can do without the church, and therefore neglecting the only two things that Christ told His church to do, because only His church can do them – preach the Gospel and build up the saints in sound doctrine for holy living.

### **Precious Knowledge**

You see, *the third thing that Paul says about the knowledge that unites true believers in Christ is that it is precious knowledge.* It is precious knowledge. In Him “are hidden all the *treasures* of wisdom and knowledge.” These are treasures that the church is so often neglecting today. Neglecting true wealth. Neglecting God’s treasury. Neglecting God’s precious wisdom and knowledge.

The writer to the Hebrews, Hebrews chapter eleven, says that Moses understood why you can’t do this. And so he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the temporary benefits of participating in the sinful world of the Egyptians. Why? The writer to the Hebrews makes this astounding statement: It was because Moses esteemed the criticism and reviling that he would suffer for the cause

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of Christ to be greater riches than all of the treasures of Egypt. The writer says that Moses "had respect unto the recompense of the reward." Literally, in the original language, the Bible says that Moses looked away from everything else, and he fixed his eyes on the one thing that mattered, and that was the reward that he would receive from God.

The knowledge that unites true believers in Christ is precious. It is the one thing that true believers in Christ must strive after. You must look away from everything else to this. "Looking unto Jesus." This is where your reward is. Not in the things of this world. Not in the ways of this world. Not in the thinking of this world. But in the mind of Christ.

### **Next Time**

The knowledge that unites true believers in Jesus Christ is knowledge of the mystery of God; it is hidden or stored-up knowledge that the world doesn't have; and, it is precious knowledge. That is the kind of knowledge you need to be seeking after. And you will find that knowledge only in God's Word.

Now, we have four remaining characteristics of the knowledge that unites true believers yet to consider, and we're going to take them up next time. This will be our final message on Colossians chapter two, verses one through three. We're going to consider these remaining four facts about the knowledge that unites true believers in Christ:

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- Number four, it is full or comprehensive knowledge.
- Number five, it is accurate or precise knowledge.
- Number six, it is complete knowledge.
- And number seven, the knowledge that unites true believers in Christ is consistent knowledge.

Dear friend, this is "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." Use the knowledge that you have, seek the knowledge that you need, all of it from Christ through His Word.

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