

“Paul’s Concern for the Church”

Colossians 2:1-5

Turn with me in your Bibles to Colossians 2, where we will read from verses 1-5. When we were younger, most of us thought we were the smartest people in the room. But a funny thing happens as you get older—you get to a point where your mom and dad become the smartest people you know. I’m talking about the life cycle of perspective we go through with our parents. The phases often look like this:

- **Childhood** (ages 5–10): “My parents know everything!” Kids look up to their parents as the ultimate source of truth and wisdom.
- **Early Adolescence** (ages 11–15): “My parents don’t know anything.” This is the ‘eye roll’ phase. Kids feel like they’ve outsmarted their parents.
- **Late Adolescence** (ages 16–20): “My parents are so out of touch.” This is where teens think their parents just don’t understand ‘today’s world.’
- **Young Adulthood** (ages 21–30): “Well... maybe my parents knew a thing or two.” Life throws its curveballs, and people realize their parents’ advice wasn’t so bad. In fact, it was pretty good.
- **Adulthood** (30s–50s): “My parents are pretty smart.” As you raise your own kids, you start to appreciate your parents’ patience and wisdom.
- **Later Adulthood** (50+): “I wish I could ask Mom/Dad what to do.” By this point, you recognize just how much wisdom they had—and you miss it deeply as they’re no longer around.

I can’t help but wonder if we go through a similar phase in our spiritual lives.

Youthful, immature faith sometimes says it knows a thing or two. It is proud and

independent, totally capable. But as we mature and deepen in our faith, as we grow closer to Jesus, we begin realize just how much we don't know and how much we need those 'seasoned' saints in our lives. Christianity isn't a solo venture.

We've been learning about the letter that Paul wrote to the Colossians. And today we are in the second chapter where we will look at the first five verses or so. And its a reminder of how much we need each other in the body of Christ. I'm in need of you, and you're in need of me. You need those other people who are right there around you. I suppose that we all go through spiritual adolescence of sorts where we think we've got this, and we don't need anyone else in our estimation. The church is optional instead of essential. We value independence and autonomy. Many years ago, Dr. Philip Zimbardo wrote an article for Psychology Today that was entitled, "The Age of Indifference." Listen to what he said about isolation:

"I know of no more potent killer than isolation. There is no more destructive influence on physical and mental health than the isolation of you from me and us from them. It has been shown to be a central agent in the etiology of depression, paranoia, schizophrenia, rape, suicide, mass murder, and a wide variety of disease states."

People who often 'go off the deep end' begin by isolating themselves from others. Before they act out in ways that are harmful both to themselves and others, the pattern is they socially isolate themselves from any and everybody. And one of the devil's strategies against humanity is to isolate a person from community. We seem to promote this type of thing in the way that we approach life these days. So that no longer are we a people who are sharing our lives openly with others. A new neighborhood gets built and one the first things it does it put up a gate.

Then you move into a home in that neighborhood and the first thing you do is put up a fence. We wear earbuds as we walk through airports or walk to class. Our motto is privacy, our commitments are short-term. When you go to lunch in a little while, pay attention and watch as people are sitting at the table across from one another, but not talking to one another. Instead, everyone is on a screen.

Christianity is about a personal relationship with Jesus, but in no way does that mean it is a private endeavor. I find it amazing that even the Apostle Paul, theologian and brilliant mind that he was, surrounded himself with people. We find that his letters are filled with names that may be unfamiliar to us, but were very familiar to him. They were his friends. For instance, the last chapter of Romans is filled with some 29 names of people who were close to him. What's more is that now here in Colossians, he is writing these words of encouragement to some people that he had never even met. The only way that he knows who they are is through their mutual friend, Epaphras, whom he mentions twice in the letter. But he cares deeply for these believers. He writes from a heart that is filled with concern for them. It is a lesson for us that people matter. Jesus died for people. In particular, the people who make up the body of Christ matter. And your relationship with other people is far more important than anything else, with the exception of your own relationship with Christ, and that is a subject to which Paul will speak in our text. (Read)

At the end of chapter 1 and now in the first few verses of chapter 2, we're given a glimpse into the pastoral heart of the apostle Paul. He has great concern for the church in terms of its doctrinal purity, its spiritual unity, and its gospel integrity. Starting in verse 24 of chapter 1 and then going through verse 5 of chapter 2, he writes with very personal language to communicate the depth of his concern—I rejoice, I became, I toil, I want you to know, I say this. And now in this next

section of the letter, Paul addresses some of the ideas that had been leading them astray. Notice he mentions ‘plausible arguments’ there in verse 5, or things such as ‘philosophy and empty deceit’ in verse 8. Down in verse 16, he will say, “Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food,” or in verse 18, “Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism.” They needed to be built up in their faith in Christ so that they would not be led astray by that which sounded nice, but was not in keeping with the truth of the gospel. It is also true for us all these centuries later. Satan is still the liar that he is, and he specializes in trafficking in deception.

What are the concerns that Paul has for the Colossians? There are at least four that I want to point out. First of all, he wants them to be:

1—COURAGEOUS of heart (2:1-2a)

“For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged...”

I think it is important to point out that the chapter and verse divisions of our Bible were arranged much later than when the books were written. And I’m grateful for them, because they help us find our place in God’s Word much faster than were we to simply thumb through the pages. This is one of those places where it is important for us to understand this because Paul’s line of thought continues from what he has previously said. He’s not introducing any new thought but is continuing his emphasis on Christian maturity.

The depth of Paul’s concern is seen in verse 1 as he says, “I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you.” It is the second time he’s used this word ‘struggle.’ In verse 29, he’s explained how he has toiled and labored to preach

Jesus, warning everyone and teaching everyone for the purpose of presenting everyone mature in Christ. It was hard and exhausting work. But pay attention to how Paul says that he had been “struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me.” And now he personalizes it a bit more by telling the Colossians how great a ‘struggle’ he has had for them. The word is ‘agony’ or ‘agonizing.’ Though he hadn’t been to Colossae to see them in person, Paul wants them to know that he had been ‘agonizing’ for them before the Lord. I like how the NIV translates this—“I want you to know how hard I am contending for you.” The same word is used over in 4:12 to speak of how Epaphras had been praying for them.

I have this idea that when Paul prayed, the Holy Spirit took him around the world. There on his knees before God, he agonized on behalf of God’s people in Ephesus, in the city of Thessalonica, or for the believers in Philippi, Jerusalem, or Rome, and now for those in Colossae. I believe that he called out the names of those precious people before God. Pastors ought to pray for their people, and people ought to pray for their pastors. We’re engaged in spiritual work, and we are in need of spiritual power.

Paul says, “I want you to know how great a struggle, or just how much agonizing I’ve been in for you and for those at Laodicea, as well as for all who have not seen me face to face.” Though he hadn’t been to Colossae and Laodicea, he is concerned for their well-being. The city of Laodicea was only about 10 miles northwest of Colossae. In 4:16, Paul gives instruction to the Colossians that after his letter had been received and read by them, they were to send it on to the Laodicean church. And he had evidently written a letter which the church in Laodicea had that also needed to be sent to Colossae. More than likely, that letter was what we now know as Ephesians. Its interesting that Laodicea is

mentioned here by Paul as a church for which he is also concerned. It was a larger, wealthier congregation, and it was also one to which the Lord Jesus had something to say in Revelation 3. They had gotten to the point where they began relying on their numbers and resources. There was a sense of lukewarmness about the church, so that it was neither cold nor hot. Their spiritual fervor had cooled to room temperature. Though they had plenty of material resources, Jesus said that they were blinded to their true spiritual condition.

Well, Paul's concern for the church is somewhat similar to that because he wants their hearts to be encouraged. That is, he desires for them to be emboldened and deepened in their faith. That way, they will be able to stand against the spiritual deception that was creeping in.

“May Be Encouraged” — *verb is παρακαλέω (parakaleō) and means to call alongside; to encourage and strengthen*

Hebrews 10:24-25—“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

To encourage someone is to come alongside that person to inspire them courage. The ‘heart’ speaks of the center of a person’s being. It is more than just their emotions, but also involves the center of their thinking and decision making. It is a way of referring to the deepest part of our being so that it affects every part of us. To be encouraged of heart is this idea of being enabled to meet some difficult situation with courage and confidence. He’s essentially saying, “I want your mind to be strengthened. I want strong minds.” Why? Because the mind is the first thing that Satan assails. The devil assails the mind with lies. He

is the father of lies that spreads around his false ideas and false information, and assaults the mind with it. And that directs our behavior. Therefore it is necessary for you as a Christian to have a strong mind. And that's why these believers in Colossae were in need of encouragement.

The Greeks would use this word to describe how a general rallied his troops who had lost heart in the battle and were dejected. As a result of his words, courage was reborn and those dispirited men became fit again for action. So Paul is rallying the troops. Once person has said:

William Barclay — *“Paul’s concern is that the church be filled with the type of courage that can cope with any situation.”*

1 Peter 1:13—“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

These are times that call for courageous Christians. Satan is deceiving people all around us, and we need be ready to confront his lies with the truth. These days are especially urgent for several reasons:

- Moral confusion and cultural pressure

Society is rapidly redefining truth, morality, and even identity. Christians face immense pressure to compromise biblical convictions. Courage is needed to stand firm in a world that often labels truth as hate and conviction as intolerance.

- Spiritual deception and darkness

Scripture warns that in the last days deception will increase (2 Tim. 3:13). False gospels, shallow spirituality, and counterfeit hope are widespread. Courageous Christians must cling to the Word and boldly expose error with grace and truth.

- Hostility toward faith

We've seen that open hostility toward biblical Christianity is growing today—whether in workplaces, schools, media, or government. Courage is required to confess Christ, even when it may bring ridicule, exclusion, or persecution. We need to pray for boldness, just like the early church did in Acts 4:29.

- Opportunity for witness

Times of crisis and confusion create a longing for truth, stability, and hope. When the world is in darkness, a bold, courageous faith shines brightest. Courage isn't required just for defense—it's also for mission. The Lord Jesus never promised ease, but He did promise His presence with us (John 16:33; Matt. 28:20). These times call for Christians who, like the early church, will obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29) and live with eternity in view. And then notice secondly:

2—COOPERATIVE in love (2:2b)

“...being knit together in love...”

A second concern that Paul has for the church is that they be cooperative with one another being knit together in love. Instead of them being loosely affiliated with one another, he wants them to be of one mind and heart. Not loosely held together by the superficial, but fused together in Christian love.

“Being Knit Together”—verb is *συμβιβάζω* (*symbibazō*) and is the word we get ‘symbiosis’ from

It is the picture of the human body being held together by ligaments to make it strong. The parts represent individual believers while the ligaments represent love. Such love is what unites different people in the body of Christ. One writer has expressed it this way:

John Phillips — *“We cannot unravel our lives from those of other believers. We come from different social backgrounds. We have different levels of education. Often we have been raised in different countries and cultures. But we are knit together...A woman like Mary Magdalene is made one with a woman like Mary, the mother of Jesus. A man like Simon the Zealot is made one with Matthew the publican. Peter the doer is made one with John the dreamer. We share a common bond.”*

Paul is concerned for the Colossians to possess a unity that can withstand attack, just like a building frame that is strongly joined so that the house is firm and secure. He knew that doctrinal error would chip away at such unity. And so he knows that their faith must bear the fruit of love if they are to weather the storm. The storms will come, and so it is important for their roots to go deep.

I can remember an ice storm that we had one year in early December. Anita and I were living in Polk County. And the freezing rain kept falling one night so that the trees became weighed down with the heavy weight of the ice. You could hear the sound of trees and limbs breaking. The next day, I loaded up the truck with a couple of guys and we worked all day cutting trees out of the road. And I noticed how the pines were especially vulnerable to the storm, with many of them toppling over so that the roots were exposed. One of the reasons the ice storm took so many of them out is due to their shallow root system.

Paul is concerned for the ‘root system’ of the church. He is concerned that their roots grow down deep into Christ and are intertwined with one another. He even says as much in verse 7—“rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith.” Love is an issue of our root system. And most of us probably don’t spend a whole lot of time thinking about the root system of our lives. We tend to be more concerned with the branches, those areas which are visible and under

inspection from other people. But a healthy root system will result in branches weighed down with fruit! To bear the right kind of fruit, we need to give proper focus to the root. Then notice a third concern:

3—CONFIDENT in salvation (2:2c-3)

“...to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

Paul is concerned that the church be courageous in heart and cooperative in love, but notice that he also desires for them to be confident in their salvation. He says in verse 2 that he wants them to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding. Not to be content with simply a surface knowledge, but to grow confident in spiritual understanding so that they have ‘full assurance.’ Those who were threatening the Colossians with their false ideas claimed to offer wisdom or understanding that was hidden in some type of experience, or a higher knowledge that they needed to possess. But Paul wants them to know that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. In other words, Jesus has all the information we need to have assurance. He has given it in His Word!

Luke 23:43—“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise.”

John 5:24—“More assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”

John 6:47—“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.”

Steven J. Lawson—*“God wants us to have a ‘know-so’ salvation. Figuratively speaking, He does not want you to be a question mark, all bent over in doubt with your head hung low. Rather, He wants you to be an exclamation mark, standing erect with head held high, strengthened by a God-produced confidence in your faith in Him.”*

God desires for you to be saved and to know that you are saved! It is absolutely critical for you to live with the assurance that you know God because it is the key to joy and confidence in life. This is one of the reasons that John wrote his first epistle in which he deals with the subject of Christian assurance. He makes several statements about a believer’s confidence in his or her salvation.

1 John 3:14—“We know that we have passed out of death into life...”

John says ‘we know’ that we have passed out of death into life. There is an inward assurance that we can possess as believers. The word ‘know’ is a perfect tense verb which describes an action as having been completed once for all.

The idea is we have come to know something through personal experience. We know that a change has taken place in us. We have passed out of spiritual death into spiritual life. These are the opposite spiritual domains in which every person resides. To say it another way, a man is either saved or unsaved, regenerate or unregenerate, walking in darkness or light. The Bible says that every person by nature is born into this world in a state of spiritual death.

Romans 5:12—“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”

And the tragic result of the fall is that death now reigns in man’s fallen world. Ours is a world in spiritual death, and the reality of physical death is owed to this.

Humanity is born into a condition of spiritual death and separation from God and are dead in trespasses and sins. We are born into the realm of death, we live in the atmosphere and condition of death, and the time is coming when we will close our eyes in death. But God did something for the world to save us from the darkness!

Matthew 4:16—“The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”

Light stepped into our darkened world. Life entered into our death. The gospel says that men and women who are dead in sin can possess life through faith in Jesus Christ. And so to pass from death into life is to experience the permanent change from a state of lostness to a state of being saved. It is the personal experience of the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus. To be a Christian is to be someone who has passed from death into life. It is this principle of life now possessed which makes the Christian different from the rest of the world. That is something I can know with certainty! We can know for sure that we've been brought from the realm of death into the realm of life, that we've been brought from darkness into light. This is our assurance!

4—CONVINCED by truth (2:4-5)

“I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.”

Paul's concern for the Colossians is such that he desires for them to be courageous of heart, cooperative in love, confident in salvation, and convinced

by truth. He says to them in verse 4, “I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.”

“Plausible Arguments” — *well crafted arguments, high sounding nonsense*

No doubt the ideas and speculations that the false teachers offered were fascinating. They wowed their listeners with their sophistication and impressive rhetoric. However, with each step of their methodology they steered their listeners farther away from Christ. And that is the way it always is with false teachers. They don’t show up as the wolves that they are, but they come dressed in sheep’s clothing. They like to use the same vocabulary we do, but with different definitions. They use our thesaurus, but not our dictionary. You say, “What do you mean?”

In other words, it means that they use the same words that Christians use, but they mean something entirely different by them. They use familiar Christian terms like ‘grace,’ or ‘faith,’ ‘salvation,’ and ‘Jesus.’ To the average person, it sounds biblical and orthodox. But in the false teacher’s system, those same words are redefined to fit their own theology or agenda. For example, a cult might say, “We believe in Jesus Christ,” but their ‘Jesus’ is not the eternal Son of God. He isn’t fully God or fully man. Or they might talk about ‘salvation,’ but mean a system of moral improvement rather than being justified by faith through the finished work of Christ.

Because they use familiar language, they gain the trust of believers who assume the meanings are the same. But their dictionary—their underlying theology—is radically different. This is what makes them so deceptive. They use linguistic camouflage. They use Christian words to blend in among believers, but their teachings actually lead people away from the true gospel. The Bible says:

2 Corinthians 11:13-15—“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.”

False teachers use the Christian’s thesaurus—the same words—but not the Christian’s dictionary—they have very different meanings. It’s exactly what Jude warned about when he said certain men had “crept in unnoticed” (Jude 4). They talk our talk, but they don’t walk our truth. And so friends, that’s why we need to grow in our knowledge and understanding of the truth so that we can stand firm against deception.

Hosea 4:6—“My people perish for lack of knowledge.”

Courageous of heart, cooperative in love, confident of salvation, and convinced by truth. This is what Paul says he wants for the Colossians, and we should desire these same things in our own lives. The deeper we know Christ, the more stable and confident our faith becomes. Paul’s ‘great struggle’ for the believers shows that growth in Christ is not easy—it involves prayer, perseverance, and pursuit. Growth demands that we move beyond spiritual infancy, where feelings and convenience guide us, to a place of steadfast faith rooted in truth. And it’s difficult because it calls us to die to self, to love others sacrificially, and to stay united even when relationships are strained. It requires we seek understanding through God’s Word rather than being satisfied with shallow knowledge. The world’s persuasive arguments, false ideas, and cultural pressures all try to pull believers away from Christ, which makes discernment and steadfastness hard work. It’s far easier to remain spiritually comfortable than to press on toward the ‘full assurance of understanding.’ Yet Paul reminds us that though difficult, this pursuit of maturity is worth every effort, for in Christ are found all the treasures of

wisdom, stability, and lasting joy. A firm faith requires that our roots grow down deep into Christ. Who knows how God may be working in our lives to bring us to that point?

Billy Graham once told the story of how during the Great Depression, a Christian man lost nearly everything he had—his job, his savings, his home, everything. But in the midst of such hardship, he clung to his faith, the only thing he had left. One day, while walking down the street and wrestling with what life had been reduced to, he happened to stop beside a large church being built. There were some stonemasons working, and one of them was chiseling out a triangular piece of stone. Curious, the man asked, “What are you going to do with that piece of stone?” The stone-cutter looked up and pointed to a small triangular opening high up in the church near the steeple. He said, “Do you see that opening up there? Well, I’m shaping this stone down here so that it will fit up there.” And the man walked away with tears in his eyes, because suddenly he realized how God was doing that with him, “chiseling” away at the painful parts of his life so that he might someday fit into the place God has prepared—that his hardships weren’t futile, but formative. The Lord is using all of it in our lives to bring us to maturity in Christ.