

Complete: For the Local Church – Colossians 2:1-5

Growing up we did not get the local newspaper delivered to our house. We were not the uppity sort who did such things. However, every Sunday we would stop on the way home from church and purchase a Sunday paper from the local gas station. The best part of the Sunday paper was the extra thick comics section, which was also in color. High living.

Anyone who has read comics knows that one of the longest running and most loved was *Peanuts*. Charlie Brown, Snoopy, and friends would occasionally offer profound wit and wisdom. For example, maybe you've heard this line elsewhere and had no idea that it came from Linus, one of the characters in *Peanuts*. *"I love mankind, it's people I can't stand."*

Linus's words get to something that most of us have experienced from time to time. It's easy to feel a general affection for mankind. It's easy to talk about the brotherhood of man, the good of humanity, and to broadly want the good of our society. But it's not so easy to show love to that person with bad breath or that co-worker with different political views, or that family member whose daily habits get under your skin. General is easy, but it's the specific that gets hard.

I think you can see this principle at work in the way people relate to the church as well. It's often easy to have general affection for the church and to talk about the church in positive terms. But when it comes to the relationships in a specific local church, it gets much more difficult.

Two weeks again we studied the end of Colossians 1 and saw Paul outline his approach to ministry in verses 24-29. This approach was very general, and I hope was helpful to us as we think about life in the church. But Paul doesn't leave his discussion of ministry general or broad. At the beginning of chapter 2 he's going to take the principles of 1:24-29 and show how they work out specifically in the life of the local church. It's great to say nice things about the church in general, but Paul understands that the universal church always expresses itself in the local church with real people and real relationships.

Let me show you how Paul moves from the general to the specific. Look back to 1:24-29 and I'll read this whole section as a reminder. Notice verse 29 where Paul says he struggles. Now look at 2:1 and notice how it begins with the word "for" and immediately Paul applies this struggle and work to the Colossians and other local churches. This word "struggle" was often used in the context of athletic competition. The idea is an athlete who works hard in training and struggles to improve. Paul puts that sort of effort into his work for the local church.

Now, this effort is, of course, powered by God's gracious working in Paul. Look back to verse 29. And this effort is directed toward specific goals in the Colossian church. So, here's what we will look at today. **5 Goals Worth Working For in the Local Church.**

1. Encouragement through Togetherness (v. 2a)

Paul struggles for the Colossians with this first goal in mind. Look at verses 1 into the first part of verse 2. Paul genuinely wants the believers at Colossae to be encouraged. In fact, this is why he sent this letter with Tychicus. Look at 4:17-18.

I'm afraid that sometimes encouragement sounds cheap to us. Like therapeutic good vibes where we all get together and try to make each other feel good. That's not what Paul has in mind for encouragement. To encourage someone is to instill that person with courage, cheer, and comfort. Notice that this encouragement is aimed at the heart.

Keep in mind that in Scripture the heart is more than just your emotions although it is not less than that. The heart includes the mind and the will. It's the totality of your inner person. When Paul wants your heart to be encouraged, he wants a deep seated courage and joy built into your whole inner person. Encouragement comes because of our togetherness in love. Look further into verse 2.

The church ought to be a place of encouragement. We ought to feel stronger, more equipped, and more joyful when we gather together. Our relationships with one another and the teaching we receive should build us up and prepare us for life. The whole experience of being with the church should produce this, but let's think specifically about your role in this encouragement.

Are you a person that increases encouragement within the body or decreases it? The presence and words of some people bring life, cheer, and comfort, and the presence of others shrinks it and stifles joy. I'm not saying to gloss over the difficulties of life and to ignore the hard things and never bring them up. But even within the challenges there's reason for optimism and hope.

What perspective do you bring to the body? If you look for potholes you will see them and then you will talk about them. When you look for grace and try to be thankful you will express that and the result will be cheer, courage, and encouragement to those around you as we are together in love.

This first goal provides the context in which all of the other goals take place. In other words, the local church is the environment where the rest of the goals happen. So, let's move on to our second goal and I think you can see how the encouragement we receive from being together in love leads to this second goal.

2. Assurance of Understanding (v. 2b)

Continue reading in verse 2. Paul wants us to grow together so that we can gain the riches of full assurance. The idea here is confidence or certainty. Isn't this what we all desire? More and more certainty concerning the truths we hear in church.

Let's make sure we connect this back to the encouragement that comes as we gather together. Being with God's people builds confidence because we see God at work in others and when we see it we believe it more and more. We see God change people, we hear about His work, we see others baptized and this increases our confidence and assurance.

We need each other for assurance. We need relationships and conversations. We need small group discussions that show how the truths of Scripture work themselves out in our lives. We need togetherness and we need understanding. Look again at verse 2. The local church should be a place where our understanding of the truth of the gospel increases. And this leads right into our third goal.

3. Knowledge of Christ (vv. 2b-3)

Look at the rest of verse 2. Keep in mind Paul wants us to reach the riches of full assurance and to reach the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ. Reaching implies continued growth and progress. Specifically, the knowledge is of Christ and notice how he mentions that Christ is God's mystery.

This takes us back to 1:25-26. Remember the idea of a mystery in Scripture. Something hidden in the OT but now made clear. The thing made clear is Christ and His work and our union with Him. Paul proclaims this as the heart of his ministry and this is what he wants the Colossian believers to know. Why? Because of verse 3.

Paul has already mentioned the **riches** of full assurance and now he mentions the **treasures** that are hidden in Christ. These treasures are wisdom and knowledge. One author explained verse 3 this way: *Christ is the one in whom is to be found all that one needs in order to understand spiritual reality and to lead a life pleasing to God.* – Douglas Moo

We now have access to all we need in Christ and as we come to know Him more and more. This is the great pursuit of the church and of each individual in the church. To increase our knowledge of Christ so that we can uncover the riches and treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Do you want to know how to live and how to make sense of the world? Do you want wisdom? Listen to Proverbs 2:1-8 which provides the background to this. Search for wisdom. Pursue it. But pursue it in Christ.

The idea here is that there is a mine where treasures are abundant beyond your wildest imagination, but they are only accessible in and through Christ. Only as you deepen your knowledge of Him will you find these precious gemstones of wisdom. You know where the mine is and where the treasures are found, but what do most of us do? We toy around on the surface. We casually take a couple of steps into the mine and then we go back to our TV shows, our social media, our video games, our wasting of hours.

The treasures and delights of Christ are accessible to us through Scripture, and we find them together through the church. Don't waste this opportunity given by grace. Let's move on to our 4th goal.

4. Protection from Delusion (v. 4)

This letter that Paul wrote to the Colossians is meant to combat some false teaching that was threatening the church there. We know that from the whole letter, but verse 4 is the first time Paul mentions the false teaching in the letter. Look at verse 4.

Throughout the letter Paul tells the Colossians that they will find all they need in Christ. They don't need to add anything or take anything away and they don't need to look elsewhere. He wants them to pursue wisdom and knowledge in Christ so that they won't be deluded.

This word translated "deluded" is only used one other time in the New Testament. James 1:22. You can see here that delusion can be self-deception, but here it comes through reasonable sounding arguments. Growing in the knowledge of Christ will keep us from being confused by arguments that sound good on the surface, but don't lead to wholeness and holiness.

This is particularly important in our day because of the huge variety of teaching that comes to us online. One author put it like this: *There is a fresh responsibility laid on Christians to examine all teaching for the truthfulness of its content rather than the attractiveness of its packaging.* - Dick Lucas

If Paul were alive in our day he would continue to emphasize the importance of finding wisdom and knowledge in Christ to protect from error.

5. Stability of Faith (v. 5)

Paul finishes this section by explaining why he warns them against false teaching, and this is our 5th goal worth working for in the local church. Look at verse 5.

Apparently, the false teaching was a threat in Colossae, but it hadn't infected the church yet to any great degree. Even though Paul isn't physically with the Colossians, he loves to hear about their stability and faith.

Both “good order” and “firmness” are military metaphors, and the idea is that the church in Colossians is well equipped and stands ready for battle against the false teaching they are faced with. They trust Christ and are continuing to trust Him. Their doctrinal beliefs are sound, and they know the gospel and Christ. Paul wants them to continue in this.

All 5 of these goals are things Paul wanted for the church in Colossae, and they are goals that are worth pursuing for us here at WBC. And keep in mind that they are worth pursuing in the context of the local church. It’s great to love the church generally, but Christ died to build the universal church through local churches. Those of you who are members here at WBC, keep investing here through love and unity and keep pursuing Christ. Those of you who are new, consider what local church you will join to pursue these five goals. It’s a privilege and a joy. Let’s pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 4/12/26

- Do you have a favorite comic? Which one and why?
- When was the last time you read a physical newspaper?
- Explain how Linus's words, "I love mankind, it's people I can't stand" help to explain the way some people relate to the church.
- How does Colossians 2:1-5 relate to 1:24-29?
- Explain what it means to offer encouragement to others within the church. What are some practical ways you can grow in more regularly encouraging others?
- What's the difference between someone who seems to naturally encourage others and someone who seems to naturally stifle joy?
- What are some of the benefits that come when you experience assurance of salvation?
- What would you say to someone struggling with assurance? How would you try to help him or her?
- What's one way you can grow in your knowledge of Christ this week?

- What's one thing that tends to keep you from the knowledge of Christ?
- What are some "plausible arguments" that influence the church today that we need to be warned against?