

Colossians – August 24th, 2014 – Colossians 2:1-7

Before we look at our text in chapter 2, we want to go back and pick up Paul's last words in chapter 1.

Vs. 28 i After elucidating the "mystery" that has been hidden from people in the past, which is "Christ in you," Paul goes on to declare that it is this very message about Christ that Paul constantly proclaims. Here are his words, "And we proclaim Him, admonishing **every man** and teaching **every man** with all wisdom, that we may present **every man** complete in Christ" (vs. 28).

You have to be reading with your eyes closed to miss a particular point in this verse, which is, "**every man**" is a special part of Paul's focus here. The Gnostics believed that only the elite, the intellectuals, the ones who had special knowledge, could find the path to God. Gnostics aren't the only ones who think that way. Universities also think of themselves as the super elite, the rest of us are plebeians (i.e. a common people, not a member of the intellectuals). While in college, several of my professors became good friends. I also played on a softball team that was made up of Indiana University administrative people and college professors. There was an attitude that permeated our team that looked down on those who were not "in the know." Some churches also follow this error, teaching that you will not get the inside scoop that will help you grow, unless you are a member of their particular denomination. Paul stands against this exclusive outlook on the Christian faith. He proclaims that "every man" (and woman) can hear, every man can learn, and all can be presented "complete," or mature, in Christ – even farmers and eye doctors, even you.

Vs. 29 i It is for the purpose of helping "every man (and woman)" grow into maturity, that Paul labors. "For this purpose also, I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me" (verse 29). Paul wants maturity to occur in all believers and he declares that all of us can grow, without some secret, esoteric, inside scoop that might be available to some but not all.

Before we move into chapter 2, a comment about Paul's words, "I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." I've seen many people who want to get into the "ministry." They become a Christian and one month later, they decide to go to seminary. If God calls a person there, that inner urging won't go away. But don't jump too quickly. Grow up in Christ a little bit. Even Paul spent three years reflecting on his new faith prior to entering into his "calling" (Galatians 1:17-18). Hence, be around the Christian faith for a while and grow before jumping into full-time ministry, because it is important to know – ministry is hard. It is a struggle, it is a labor. The word "striving" in this verse is the Greek word "agon," the English "agony" comes from this word. Hence, "I labor, in agony, in my efforts to help you mature in the Lord" (my words, but that is what Paul means here). It isn't a picnic to be in the ministry. [Note to Jim: share Pastor Jeremy's joke about all he does is –]

Because of the difficulties involved, I counsel all of us, including myself, never berate a pastor after he has poured his heart out in giving the Sunday morning message, even if he may deserve it – don't do it. It hurts me to hear the pastor get blasted after laboring with all he is made of in delivering his message. If you really think something needs to be said, then pick a good time, not between the first and second service.

Chapter 2:1-3 – Paul’s Special Concern; that the Colossians are knit together in love

Vs. 1-3 ĩ ĩ want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf é and for all those who have not personally seen my face é **that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love**, which (love) comes from the full assurance of understanding é Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.ò

Paul’s concern in verses 1-3 is that the Colossians have unity. But notice too, *Paul realizes that lasting unity depends on truth, truth that surrounds Christ. Again, verse 2, Paul says, I struggle, so that you can “be knit together in love, attaining to the wealth that comes from ... understanding ... God’s mystery, that is, Christ.”*

Please note, Paul declares here that UNITY IS CENTERED ON CHRIST! It is our fundamental belief about Jesus, Who is He and what did He do? This is from where our unity ultimately comes. You have often heard me make that very point. I partly learned it as a result of seeing it articulated in these verses 2-3.

One of the things that I wish that people could keep in mind is that individual beliefs about theological things can vary. What we believe about the length of a man’s hair, whether or not a woman should wear pants to church, is the Lord Jesus coming before, during, or at the end of a future tribulation period or yet at some other future time, should a person be immersed in water or simply sprinkled at the time of baptism. Can music in church only be sung out of hymnals, or can music be off of a screen at the front of the church accompanied by a guitar é or would wisdom seek out a balance between these two singing formats? Is a Christian permitted to smoke or will the lighting up of a cigar send him off to hell, ĩdo not pass go, do not collect \$200,òshoot him off in a tunnel straight down to hell. These and many other more important issues have differing degrees of merit. In my view, each has a certain relative importance in coming to the Biblical viewpoint of that issue. But none of them equal the primary concern, which is this, ĩWho is Jesus and what did He do on the cross?ò And that is Paul’s point in verses 2-3.

There is a basic fundamental truth that we can never yield as unimportant or secondary when it comes to ĩunityòin the Christian faith. That truth centers on Jesus. Who is He and what did He do? Christian unity, Paul declares, only occurs when we ĩattain to the full understanding of God’s mystery, which is Christò(vs. 2). Read along with me as we look at this email from a pastor in Indianapolis. His name and his denomination will be withheld to protect the guilty.

Dear Patty,

I don’t believe that Jesus was God in the flesh. Friend, Patty, there are many paths through a forest. Is it important that I take your path or is it more important that as each of us ventures out, to view what interests our souls the most, whether it be wildflowers or the meadow, or stones of the mountain. We simply call out to each other along the way, ĩGo on, go on,òand we call out, ĩGood news,òand the other one says, ĩThe meadow is gorgeous.ò Well this is what’s important. Does a good parent say to a child, ĩMy way or the highway? [Note to the class, that is what the parents at my house say to the children, in Christian love, of course.]

I believe that God is big enough to handle many different paths that lead to God. Not

just one. I choose to follow Christ as I understand Him. This path works for me.
[Yeah, and following the Great Pumpkin might work for him, too]

I wholeheartedly agree that Christ was the ñ AM.ò Christ is the ñ AMòand that is not far from the Hindu concept of Omm, I AM, Omm, I AM, Omm, almost sounds the same, doesn't it? [Note to the class: this is a pastor! Of a church that declares itself Christian on the door] Amazing that the same concept of God as ñ AMòexisted in Buddhism. Amazing that it is in a great many religions. Allah, Muslim, I AM. Wakentonkuh, tribal Indian, I AM. There is another religion, too, the Great Spirit I AM. You see, I believe that I AM and that you are ñ AM.ò Hearing your words, Patty, over the phone and reading them in your email, I see the ñ AMòin you, and the ñ AMòin me. I see the ñ AMòin everyone. [Note to class: yeah, and I see the ñ AMòin this microphone. What a bunch of gobblety-gook]

Paul declares that unity comes when we understand who the Biblical Jesus is. This pastor preaches a different Jesus, one that arises from his own mind. So, ñunity,òyes. ñKnit together in love,òyes, surrounded by fundamental truth though.

Notice also that, vs. 3, ñIn Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.ò If you want to mature, getting to know Jesus is at the root of it. If you want to grow, understanding who He is é developing a closer friendship and a deeper trust of Him is at the heart of all Christian growth. It's not learning about in which part of the end times He will return. That may be fun, that may be helpful and even have great value. But spiritual growth comes from getting to know Jesus more intimately. This is important. Growth doesn't come from secret rituals, wearing charms, WWJD bracelets, carrying your Bible. It doesn't come understanding some of the doctrines of the Bible, from knowing the Greek language, nor from constant church attendance. It comes from knowing Jesus, in whom ñare hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.ò

Paul's use of the word ñhiddenòis a blow aimed at the Gnostics. ñApokruphosòmeans ñhidden from gaze,òtherefore ñsecret.ò The Gnostics believed that a great mass of elaborate knowledge was necessary for salvation. That knowledge they put down in their books and called it ñapokruphos,òbecause that ñknowledgeòwas barred to the ordinary man. By using this one word, Paul is saying, ñYou Gnostics have your wisdom hidden from ordinary people; we too have our knowledge, but it is not hidden in unintelligible books that only the elite can read; it is hidden in Christ and therefore open to all men everywhere, whoever has Christ.ò The truth of Christianity is not a secret which is hidden but a secret which is revealed.

Colossians 2:4-7 – How to mature in Christ, Three thoughts

Vs. 4 ñI say this,òé what, what does ñthisòrefer to? **That in “Christ, is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”** When people ask what religion we are, we shouldn't say ñPresbyterian.ò Presbyterian didn't die for our sins; Baptist didn't die for our sins. We are Christians. Christ died for our sins and lives in us. In Christ, is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. So Paul says here, ñIn telling you this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argumentò(vs. 4). The new teachers were good in their presentation, smooth as silk. There is nothing wrong in attempting to be persuasive. Paul tried to be persuasive, all teachers try to be. But there is a ñpersuasionòthat is based on fiction and there is a persuasion that is built on truth. Paul was afraid that the Colossians would be

lulled to sleep in their thinking and blindly accept the false teaching being presented to them by the false but persuasive teachers. He was attempting to appeal to their mind and get them to think about the facts. Don't shelve your brain, Paul urges. We have an entire history, an entire Old Testament set of books that validates the things we are saying. If someone comes along with some "new" message, be suspicious. On the other hand, God said in Isaiah 43:10, "I have made you (Jews) witnesses of all that I have done in history, in order that you may KNOW, BELIEVE, and UNDERSTAND, that I am He. There was no God formed before Me, there will be no God formed after Me." See those three verbs? Those are not "emotion" verbs; those are verbs of the mind, the intellect. And that is what Paul appeals to, history, reality, truth, not just slick persuasive teaching based on hopeful thinking and false teaching. So Paul's persuasion is based on turning the Colossians minds back to the facts. There is a persuasion that causes people to shelve their brain, but Paul calls them, with his persuasion, to engage their brains.

Vs. 5-7 "For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your **faith in Christ**. As you therefore **have received Christ Jesus** the Lord, so **walk in Him**, having been **firmly rooted and now being built up in Him** and **established in your faith in Jesus**, just as you were instructed; and overflowing with gratitude."

Look yet again, everything to Paul, when it comes to living the Christian life, relates to Christ. Look at the number of times he links their Christian walk to Christ! "I see the stability of your faith é IN CHRIST." "As you have received Christ é walk IN HIM." "You were rooted firmly (IN CHRIST) now be built up IN HIM." "Be established in your faith IN JESUS."

The new teaching in Colossae appealed to the believers there because it offered them something that they wanted, it spoke to a real need. It called for "maturity," for "fullness of experience," it called for "putting away of sin," all of which are worthy goals. The teaching challenged the Colossians not to be satisfied with a second rate Christian life and it pointed the way toward which the Colossians could walk and leave the shallow Christian life behind. It's just that the path to this "fuller living" was not correct, it was lethal. Of course, Paul wants them to be built up and grow in their faith, but he wants them to pursue those lofty goals the proper way. Paul knew that if they pursued the course that the false teachers proclaimed, they would be lead down the path of destruction. To Paul, the proper way to reach these goals was and is linked to Jesus. They already possessed all that they needed for maturity to take place.

They didn't need the secret handshake, the hidden ritual, the praying with the use of beads, the worship of angels, the knowledge of codes and secret passwords, the acquisition of certain external aids to worship, the keeping of ritualistic law to climb up the ladder of deities. No, they needed to more fully enact in their life what they ALREADY had received. They already had the key to the fuller life planted within their spirits, their inner life. They had Christ and that was all they needed. They did not need any of these new Gnostic approaches.

Carefully observe that Paul says three things in verses 6-7.

As you received Christ é so walk (in Him)

As you were rooted é so be built up (in Him)

As you were instructed é so be established in your faith (in Him)

“To walk in Him” means that we have an awareness of Christ’s presence in our life throughout the day, and that we bring every situation that we encounter in life under the Lordship of Jesus (Lord = boss). How would Jesus have me act in this situation?

“To be built up” means to mature, grow, and enter more fully into full Christian living.

Paul does not want churches to preach only a salvation message. Paul would call that the elementary things of the faith. “Let us press on to maturity” Hebrews 6:1 says. Paul wants the salvation message to be taught, of course, but that is a side point of “church.” The “church” is for the worship of God and for Christians to hear “truth” in such a way that they can grow and mature. Besides that, non-Christians who are in an exciting church service find themselves being evangelized by the fact of the excitement in the air. It appeals to them to watch Christians eagerly getting into some spiritual meat. [Note to Jim: tell about youngest daughter who wanted the steak we were eating rather than the syrupy junk split pea squash, bluhhh. She wanted the meat her parents were eating.]

The word “rooted” has two ideas, a.) to put a seed in the ground and then it sprouts. (we don’t put a seed in the ground hoping to see the end of it. We put it there in hopes that it will grow up. The “rooting” is the beginning point. b.) “root” also has the idea, in Paul’s day, of the foundation of a house. To sink a foundation of a building. You don’t lay the foundation and say, “Well, that’s it.” No, you build a house on it. That’s Paul’s point, don’t stop, having just been saved, press on, go to maturity. So, he says, “having been rooted, be built up.”

“To be established in the faith” means to grow in stability, greater understanding, increasing in knowledge and trust in Jesus. As the Colossians, and us, were originally instructed in the ways of Jesus, now they need to grow in their understanding of Him so that they can implement His ways more effectively in their life and trust Him more. This knowledge is not inconsistent with the original teachings, but constitutes a “fuller measure” of them. Note that the Greek in this verse reads, “be established in THE faith” (not “your faith,” as the NASB reads). That is, be established in that body of knowledge that comprises Biblical Christianity. How do I mature? One key way is to increase your knowledge of the Bible and therefore, Biblical Christianity. You need to subject yourself to good teaching on a regular basis and to study the Bible privately as well.

As seen in verses 6-7, Paul does not want us to be complacent in our Christian life. He doesn’t want us to come to church with the attitude of, “Yawn, it’s time for church again” so we go through the motions of church, go home, and live life. No, he calls for the bringing of Christ into everyday life.

Important Concluding Thoughts regarding the threefold call in verses 6-7

Having been “rooted,” we are to be “built up,” that is, mature. Maturing in Christ comes as we “walk in Him.” As Paul said, “As you received Christ, so walk (or live) in Him.”

Since this is an intensely important aspect of our Christian faith, I would like to ask, “How does one go about that? What does “walking (living) in Him” look like?”

Before we turn to the back page and look at some of the answers I have given to this question, let’s discuss it a few minutes as a class

What does it mean to “walk with God”?

It means that the person has an abiding communion and fellowship with God that continues throughout the day. It means that one lives life along the precepts that Jesus would have us live.

How does or how can a person “walk with God”?

Walking with God implies our making progress in the divine life. Walking requires a progressive motion. If this “walking” with God, or “living” with God is as important as it sounds, how does one accomplish and maintain this “walk”?

1. Read the Scriptures. Search the Scriptures, both on your own and under a trusted teacher/preacher who can apply them to daily life.
2. Personal prayer. I can NOT maintain a good relationship with my wife, if I don’t regularly talk to her. Even though prayer does not include audible responses from God to our words, nevertheless, prayer is direct communication with the Lord, He hears us, our hearts are elevated to His throne room when we speak to Him in prayer. His ways and desires can be impressed upon our souls when we worship Him in prayer and declare that His ways are just.
3. Meditation. Take time, when opportunity affords, or else make time, to mentally reflect on the works and word of God. You will frequently feel the fire of divine love rekindled in your soul when you do this. This is especially so when we meditate on “God manifest in the flesh,” the Lamb of God slain for the sins of the world! Be frequent in meditation if you desire to maintain a close and uniform walk with the Jesus.
4. Note God’s Providence. Believers keep up their walk with God by watching and noting His providential dealings with them. “The very hairs of his disciples’ heads are numbered; a sparrow does not fall to the ground without the knowledge of our heavenly Father” (Matt. 10:29). Know that every cross we bear in life has a call to it. If believers are to maintain their walks with God, they must hear what the Lord has to say to them in the voice of providence. “A little hint from providence,” says Bishop Hall, “is enough for faith to feed upon.”
5. Obedience. Maintaining a walk with God requires that we must make decisions to live before Him in accord with His commandments. After a failure to do so occurs, “confession” and “repentance” restores our “walk” and relationship.
6. Godly Association. Associate and keep company with others who walk with Him if you wish to “walk” with God yourself. Ps. 16:3, “The saints are the ones in whom is all my delight.” Christians are exhorted to see to it that they do not forsake the assembling of themselves together (Heb. 10:25). How can one be warm alone? “Iron sharpens iron.”