

Paul's Loving Heart

Colossians 2:1-7

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Beginning in verse 1, I want you to follow down to verse 7 of Colossians 2.

Paul says, “For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh...”—Paul means that “You’ve never seen me. I’ve never been there. I want you to know I have this great conflict, this great concern, this great agony in my heart for you”—“...that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in Whom...”—referring to Christ—“...are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the Spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”

As we come to the second chapter of Colossians, we have a brief lifting of the curtain, and we get a glimpse of the heart of Paul, the Apostle. Paul was many things: He was an Apostle, he was a preacher, he was a missionary and he was an evangelist. But beyond this, Paul was also a pastor. The word “pastor” is the word “shepherd.” He was a shepherd because God had given him a love for the sheep, which is the church. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, he said, “So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls...”—why?—“...because ye were dear unto us.”

One of the key marks of a pastor is the love for God's people. If you're going to shepherd the church of God, you have to have a love for the people of God. Paul wrote to the Philippians in Philippians 1:7 and he said, “I have you in my heart.” Now just as Christ “loved the church and gave Himself for it,” so did Paul and so should we.

In the context of our study of the book of Colossians, we moved in chapter 1 from doctrine—Christ's preeminence declared—to chapter 2—danger, Christ's preeminence is defended. Paul knew that the Colossian believers were in danger, and he expressed his love for them in two basic ways. The first is in verses 1-5, where we see Paul's concern. Notice back in verse 1 he says, “For I would that ye knew what great conflict...”—there's the word. It is “agony” or “concern”—“...I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.”

The church at Colosse was in the Lycus Valley, and there was a river that ran through it. There were two towns; one on each side of the river, about four miles apart. They were Laodicea and Hierapolis. Up the river a short distance was the town of Colosse. We see in the book of

Revelation that one of the letters to the seven churches was written to the church at Laodicea, this same town. Paul said he had never been there, they had never seen him and they don't really know him, other than through Epaphras, their pastor. But he wanted to reveal something to them, a thing going on in his heart. He said, "I have a great conflict."

I want you to notice the intensity of his concern. "Conflict" is where we get our word "agony." It's the same word used in chapter 1, verse 29, where Paul actually said, "I also labor, striving..."—there's the word—"...according to His working, which worketh in me mightily." And then Paul immediately said, "I want you to know what great striving..."—or "agonizo" in the Greek. We get our word "agony" from it. So Paul was in agony over people he had never seen.

Now the question is: In what sense was Paul agonizing? In what sense was Paul striving over these believers there in Colosse? He knew they were in danger, because false teachers had come into the church. That's a pastor's worse nightmare. Paul's in prison and false teachers had invaded the church. Paul was in agony over them. He was in conflict over them. But Paul is in chains many miles away from them, so what can he do? My answer is that he can get on his knees and pray. When in prison, pray might be the motto. Wherever you are, at any time, when you can't deal with a problem, you get on your knees and pray. I believe that Paul's struggle was in prayer. Paul couldn't be there. He couldn't do anything. But he did the best thing, and that's to get on his knees and pray.

I think about the fact that so often people come to me with their problems, and about 99.9% of the time, my advice to them is to pray. "Well, can't you fix him? Can't you do something?" People come to me and say, "My teenager is really messed up. If I bring him by the church this week, can you fix him?" No. Even after service, people bring up their troubled teens. "Pastor, he's really doing this. I thought you could straighten him up right now."

"For eighteen years you've messed him up, and you want me to fix him in ten minutes? It ain't gonna happen, buckaroo."

So I find myself constantly telling parents, or people who are struggling in their marriage, or struggling with their health, or struggling with their finances to pray, pray, pray, pray, pray. Turn it over to God. God answers prayer. So when you're in chains—figuratively speaking—or you're in a place where you can't be there and you can't help them or do something to remedy the problem, spend time in prayer.

Don't we as parents carry our children in our hearts? Even when they're grown and they have their own children and they're far away, what do we do for them? We pray for them. We pray daily for them; that God will bless them and watch over them and help them. It's so important. Even as an adult, I covet my parents' prayers. My mother is in heaven, but my dad prays for me. What a blessing that is.

Paul says that he's in conflict, that he's struggling. So we see the intensity of his concern. But notice, secondly, the heart of his concern. It's in verses 2-3. He prays for them that they would

have encouragement. Verse 2 says, "...that their hearts might be comforted." That word "comforted" is an interesting Greek word. We get our word "comforter" from it. It is the word "parakletos" or "paraclete." What does that mean? It means someone who comes alongside to strengthen. It means that God the Holy Spirit can come right alongside of us and comfort us. Why do I say God the Holy Spirit? Because the Holy Spirit is called the Comforter, the parakletos, in the Bible. So the Holy Spirit comes to comfort us. This is a great way to pray for others who are going through a time of difficulty: pray that their hearts might be comforted.

The comfort there is not for relief; it's for reinforcement. He's not taking away the problems or the burdens; He's giving us strength to bear them. I heard one minister say, "I don't pray for a lighter load, but I pray for a stronger back." I love that. Do you ever notice that sometimes God doesn't take away our problems? He just gives us strength to deal with them, strength to face them.

I'm always praying for God to take them away. That's my first prayer. "Lord, I pray that when I get on the freeway today, everyone will pull over and let me go right through." I pray that it will always be "slightly downhill, the wind at my back, no traffic, and they'll see Pastor Miller coming and everyone will just pull over and let me go by." It doesn't happen. I don't know why, but everywhere I've gone lately, I'm in horrible traffic. It's upsetting me. Don't they realize that I'm a man of God, that I have some things to do and some people to see? You just wish you had a God-squad motorcade and the lights are flashing and people pull over and Pastor Miller's coming; get out of the way. It just doesn't happen. The Lord says, "You just have to be patient." I don't like patience. So I need the Holy Spirit to comfort me, to come alongside me and to give me strength or reinforcement.

Thirdly, Paul prays for their endearment. I love it. Verse 2, "...being knit together in love." So he prays for them, first of all, for their love for one another. He prays for their encouragement and he prays for their endearment. It's the mark of a Spirit-filled church. "Knit together" is a medical term. It literally means to "join" or "unite together." It was used medically for the mending of a broken bone. If I ever break a bone, I want them to put me to sleep before they set that sucker. I've never broken a bone. I hear it's so painful. And when you mend that bone, it fuses back together. God wants us as believers in the church to be "knit together in love."

If you want to be encouraged and strengthened by the Comforter, then you need to be "knit together in love" with other believers in God's family. Sometimes we get isolated and insulated, and we're not involved in people's lives and fellowshiping with other people. Therefore, we lose strength, and we lose courage and we're not comforted or encouraged. You know how the Holy Spirit comes alongside you to encourage you sometimes and strengthens you? It's through the life of another believer; someone who puts their arm around you or says, "I'm praying for you" or "I love you." They're there to encourage you. So you need to be knit together with other believers. A Christian who lives in isolation from other Christians is violating the commands of Scripture. We need to be knit together with others in love. We need the body of Christ.

Then, fourthly, in verses 2-3, Paul prays for their enrichment. He prays they may have “all riches of the full assurance of understanding.” Then he prays that they may know “the mystery of God,” namely, in Christ, and then in verse 3, “...in Whom...”—that is, “in Christ”—“...are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

God wants us to have “full assurance of understanding.” I believe in the doctrine of assurance; that God’s Word teaches that you can know that you are saved and that you can know that you have eternal life. You can know that when you die you’re going to heaven. If you don’t have that assurance, then you need to get it now. If you don’t know that if you’d die you’d go to heaven, then you need to make sure you get right and ready with God. Nothing more important than knowing you’re ready to enter into eternity with God.

Are you ready to die? Do you know you are His child? Do you know your sins are forgiven? Do you know if you have eternal life? You can’t live the Christian life if you lack that full assurance, so Paul prays that for them.

Secondly in verse 2, Paul prays that they may know “the mystery of God,” namely, in Christ. God has revealed Himself in Christ and, thirdly, “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” that are hidden for us in Christ. Notice in verse 3 that all of this mystery of God, which is namely Christ, is hidden in Christ where we find “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

This is an amazing statement. If you get nothing else out of what I’ve said, take verse 3 and underline it, mark it, write it out, memorize it and don’t forget it. In Jesus Christ are hidden....What does he mean by “hidden”? He means that they’re not laying on the surface; we’ve got to dig a little deeper. It doesn’t mean we can’t know them or access them, but it means we have to desire them. If you want the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God, they’re in Christ, but you have to dig into that. You’ve got to look into that. You’ve got to come to know that. You just can’t have a surface knowledge of Who Jesus is. You have to dig deeper into the person of Christ and into the work of Christ. Those treasures are hidden in Him.

The word “wisdom” is an interesting Greek word “sophia.” And the word “knowledge” is the Greek word “gnosis” or “gnosco.” It’s interesting because Paul was praying for these Colossians to have “sophia” and this “gnosis.” What’s significant about that? The significance is that the false teachers, known as gnostics, were claiming a deep, superior knowledge and that if you really wanted the fullness of God, you had to go beyond Jesus Christ. If you really wanted to know God, Jesus was just one of many steps to God. Jesus Himself is not God, and you had to get this knowledge that only the false teachers had and can introduce you to—this gnostic understanding and deeper knowledge.

The gnostics aren’t dead; they are alive and with us today. It would be basically someone coming to you and saying, “Well, I know you’re a Christian; I know you’ve got Jesus. But you need to practice meditation or you need this other religion or you need to throw a little Buddhism in there or mysticism in there or legalism. You shouldn’t touch that or taste that or you should dress this way, or you shouldn’t go here or do that.” They bring you into either

legalism or mysticism or some kind of philosophical thought. They want to introduce you to other things to take you deeper. Basically, the false teachers were introducing Jewish legalism, eastern mysticism and Greek philosophy. Paul is saying that you don't need that. You have Jesus. Jesus is all that you need. Jesus is all that you should want. Why? Because in Him does all the fullness of wisdom and knowledge dwell.

I love what Charles Erdman said about this. He said, "Paul is insisting that the whole wealth of spiritual insight, which men need, the beliefs concerning God, which they should hold, and the laws of conduct, by which they should be guided, are all stored up for them in one place: the person of Jesus Christ." Everything you need is found in one spot, and that is in Jesus Christ. It's not a religion and it's not a system of beliefs; it's a person, and that person is Jesus Christ. So anybody who tries to get you to go beyond Jesus is deceiving you. All you need is Jesus Christ.

I want you to know what motivated Paul in this concern, verses 4-5. In verse 4, Paul said, "This I say, lest any man should beguile you." It's just as I said: Jewish legalism, eastern mysticism, Greek philosophy, some religious system, some do's and don'ts, things to make you more spiritual. You don't need these things; all you need is Jesus.

Don't let anyone beguile you. The word "beguile" in verse 4 means "to deceive by false reckoning." It was by faulty logic that they would be deceived. The same is true today. From time to time, I'll turn on Christian television. Not everyone preaching on TV is bad, but a lot of the preaching is. Don't be deceived. Don't be beguiled. I turn on the TV and I say, "But that's not what the Scriptures actually say. That's not what they actually mean. That's a faulty interpretation." They're twisting Scripture to get their own message across.

It is wrong to take a Scripture text out of context. It is wrong to read into a text some meaning that you want it to have. God said what He meant and meant what He said, and we should interpret the Bible in its historical, grammatical and theological context. In fact, the goal of Bible study is to get to the meaning of the text, and all text has one meaning.

Have you ever been in a group of people studying the Bible and they ask, "What does it mean to you? What does that passage mean to you? What does that verse mean to you?" It doesn't matter what it means to you. The question is, "What does it mean?" Not "What does it mean to you?" What did God mean by what He said? First of all, what did He say? Secondly, what does it mean? What it means is based on what it originally meant when God said it. So you can't reckon falsely. You can't read into it concepts. Don't be deceived.

Notice, in verse 4, how they deceived them: "with enticing words." I constantly hear people say, "Well, he's such a good speaker." Great; I'm all for good speakers. I'm all for charismatic speakers and dynamic speakers and funny speakers and wonderful speakers and entertaining speakers. But is it all personality and no truth? I define preaching as truth through personality. God uses your personality, but it is the truth that has to come through. So if it's all personality and no truth, then you're in big trouble.

The term “enticing words” literally means “persuasive speech.” It was used for a salesman. Interesting. Don’t you love it when you go to buy a car and the salesman comes along and says, “What do we need to do to get you in this car today?!” Slap that dude.

“Quit being nice. Quit trying to tell me.... Just answer my questions, or I’m gone.”

They get the air conditioning on and get you inside to smell the leather and feeling it. “Let’s take a drive. Let’s spin around the block in this baby.” They’re trying to sell you something. If you’re a car salesman, God bless you. We’ll have prayer for you after service.

But it’s actually persuasive speech. It’s like a salesman; they’re trying to sell you something. You don’t have to “sell” Jesus Christ. We’re not here to “sell” Him to other people by enticing words or fancy speech or fancy oratory. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:4, “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” I love that. Paul wasn’t an eloquent speaker. He wasn’t a dynamic speaker. But he had truth and he had content, and God spoke through him. This is very important: The authority lies not in the speaker; the authority lies in the Scriptures. Always.

Now no one wants to listen to a boring speaker, but I’d rather listen to a boring speaker who has truth, the Word of God, than a dynamic speaker who is spilling lies. It’s so very important. You never want to sacrifice truth for any reason. If you can bring the two together, that’s great. But the authority doesn’t lie in the speaker; the authority lies in the Scriptures. The more the speaker gets out of the way and lets the Scriptures speak, the more authority and power he has. Because it’s not the speaker; it’s the Word of God that has the power and authority to change lives. This is why I say, “Open your Bible. Follow me closely,” because God speaks through what He has spoken.

Then in verse 5, Paul expressed his confidence in them. Yes; he was concerned, but he ends this section on his concern and his agony and his struggle by affirming confidence in them. Paul said, “For though I be absent in the flesh...”—“I’m not bodily, physically with you—“...yet am I with you in the Spirit, joying and beholding...”—two things—“...your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.”

It’s interesting that the words “order” and “steadfastness” are military metaphors. They are used for an army that is in rank—hasn’t fallen out of rank—and that is standing steadfast against the enemy. So Paul is saying, “I’m with you and I’m praying for you and I’m not there physically, but I’m with you there in heart. I notice that you are staying in order and that you are staying steadfast.” The church is like an army that needs to stay obedient to Christ, and it needs to stay together in Christ and war against the enemy.

Paul then moves from his concern to his closing charge, verses 6-7. He says, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord...” I’m praying that you would “...walk...in Him; rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” So Paul starts with his agony, his concern and then expresses to them that he

wants them to stay on course as he closes in verses 6-7. Paul's charge to the Colossians was a single charge: to walk in Christ. Notice that they had "received Christ Jesus the Lord," and now they were to "walk...in Him."

How did they receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior? By faith. And now they're to "walk." When the New Testament uses that picture of the Christian life as a walk, it's indicating progression and growth. It's conveying the idea that everything you do—how you live your life, the whole life of the believer.... And by the way, this is in the present tense in the Greek. That means the way you constantly, ongoing, continually live your life. This is how you live your Christian life: walking in Christ.

Paul gives us four word-pictures in the text that describe the believer's walk. The first is a picture of a tree, in verse 7, by the word "rooted." A tree needs to be rooted. If a tree doesn't get rooted, it doesn't grow. If a tree isn't rooted, it doesn't bring forth fruit. God wants you rooted in his Word. God wants you rooted in His love. He wants you rooted in His grace. In Psalm 1:1 it says, "Blessed is the man..."—or "woman"—"...that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his..."—or "her"—"...delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night." And what are they going to be like? "...a tree." There it is. Psalm 1 is called the "happy psalm." You want to be happy and blessed? Then be rooted and grounded like a tree. "His leaf...shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." God wants to prosper you, and God wants to bless you, spiritually. But you have to be rooted and grounded like a tree. That's how we walk.

The second image or word-picture used to describe our walk is a picture of a building: "built up in Him, and established in the faith." The words "built up" is a picture of a building on a solid foundation. When you build a structure, what's the most important part of your structure? The foundation. You have to have a solid foundation to build on. So we are to be "rooted" in God's Word, and we are to be grounded in God's word. It's the foundation. Jesus is the solid rock.

Notice it says, "established in the faith." This is not your individual, subjective faith; this is the faith, which is the body of truth that we believe in. In Jude 3, it says that we "should earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints." So we need to be rooted and grounded in the faith.

Here's the third picture, verse 7: It's a picture of a school. "...as ye have been taught..." When I was in school, I wasn't a very good student. Sorry. Don't let your kids hear this message. I still have nightmares that I'm in high school. I can't find my lockers. I don't know the combination. They had lockers back then, in the ancient days. I don't know what period it is. I don't know what class it is. In class I don't have a notebook. I don't know anything. I just wake up in a cold sweat scared to death. I just hated school. But now that I'm a Christian, I love school—God's school. I'm in God's Word and I'm learning and I'm growing and I'm studying.

My parents knew that I was saved, because I was reading my Bible. I was nineteen. Just got

out of high school. They go, "Where's Johnny?"

"He's in the bedroom reading his Bible."

"Reading his Bible?! Thank You, Jesus! My son's been saved!"

I read and I read and I read and I read and I studied and I studied and I bought books and I'm still buying books and I'm still studying and I'm still reading all these years later. I just can't get enough. So God puts us in school. Every Christian must be a student of the Word of God.

"Well, I'm not much of a student."

Neither was I until God saved me, and I got this desire and appetite to know God in His Word. The more you learn about God in His Word, the stronger you're going to grow; your roots will grow deeper, your foundation will be stronger. So you're like a student grafted into God's school, and you need to learn. Study God's Word. Give yourself diligently to the knowledge of God's Word. Grow in the knowledge of God through His Word. Learn about Jesus in the Bible.

The fourth and last picture is a picture of a river. It's in verse 7: "...abounding therein with thanksgiving." You say, "I don't see a river there." The word "abounding" means "overflowing." It was actually used of a river that overflows its banks. We don't have too many rivers overflowing in California. As a matter of fact, in California we have rivers that don't have any water in them. Isn't that funny when people from the east come to visit California and we go over a bridge and we say, "That's a river"?

They say, "Where's the water?" Welcome to California. We were in Colorado recently, and there are actually rivers running in Colorado. There were actually waterfalls coming down the mountain. It was amazing.

The picture in the text of a believer is that we are to be like a river that overflows with thanksgiving. Giving thanks unto the Lord. This is the outgrowth. When you're grounded and you're rooted and you're growing, you begin to overflow. "Thank You, Jesus! Thank You for saving me. Thank You for forgiving me. Thank You for giving me eternal life. Thank You for Your Holy Spirit Who comes alongside to strengthen me and to help me." You just begin to overflow. For the Christian, every day should be Thanksgiving. We should be praising God for all the blessings He has given us.

So here it is: rooted and grounded and growing and grateful believers will not be led astray. Jesus Christ is all that you need. And Jesus Christ is all that you should want. Amen.