

Paul's Loving Heart

Colossians 2:1-7

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I'm going to read all seven verses; then we're going to go back and unpack them phrase by phrase. Follow with me beginning in verse 1. Paul says, "For I would that ye knew what great conflict,"—that's Paul's agonizing or struggling—"I have for you,"—referring to the believers in Colossae—"and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; 2 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; 3 In whom are hid,"—that is, in Christ—"all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. 5 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. 6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him,"—and look at verse 7 with me—"Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."

This entire passage that I read from Colossians 2:1-7 is actually a curtain being drawn back and a picture of the heart of the Apostle Paul. Paul was many things. He was an apostle, a preacher, a missionary, an evangelist; but beyond all that, we see Paul was a pastor. The word "pastor," by the way, means shepherd; and a shepherd must love sheep. It would be pretty hard to be a shepherd if you didn't love sheep, right? God calls a man to pastoral ministry and places in that man a love for God's people understanding they are God's people, the sheep of God's pasture; and a pastor is an under shepherd, he's under the Shepherd of the sheep, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul loved and cared for God's sheep, the church. Write down 1 Thessalonians 2:8 and listen to what Paul said. He said, "So being affectionately desirous of you,"—look at those endearing terms, "I'm affectionately desirous of you,"—"we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." Paul was a true pastor with a love for God's people, and we're going to see it in our text.

In Philippians 1:7 Paul says, ". . . I have you in my heart." Paul spoke of the believers in Philippi with the most endearing terms, more so than any other congregation. Just as ". . . Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it," Ephesians 5:25, so did Paul also love the church and gave himself for it, and so should we.

A little bit of background of where we're at in the book of Colossians, in chapter 1 we see doctrine, Christ preeminence is declared. Colossians 1 is full of theological truth about Jesus Christ. It has that great Christological passage that we looked at, but the preeminence of Christ is declared. In Colossians 2, we'll be several weeks in this chapter, we have what I would call, "Danger, Christ Preeminence Defended," and he's going to jump in and start defending them against the false teachers, which I believe were Gnostics or at least in the beginning stages of Gnosticism. Paul knew the Colossian believers were in danger, so he expressed his love for

them in two ways: by giving his concern, verses 1-5; and then his charge, verses 6,7, so there are only two main points.

One of the ways that a shepherd, a pastor, demonstrates love for God's sheep is by protecting them by teaching sound doctrine and exposing false doctrine. It's not popular or en vogue today, but I believe it's a pastor's duty to warn God's people of false teaching. Now, you can't just spend every message warning about false teaching, that's the negative, but there should be the warning. Paul, a pastor, a model for me and other pastors, constantly defended the gospel against false teachers, false prophets, and false apostles. This section of Colossians 2 is going to segue us into the defense of the gospel, and he's going to be talking about the false teachers, but he wants to affirm his love for them as he starts.

Colossians 2:1-5, if you're taking notes, is Paul's concern. Now, there are three things about Paul's concern I want to point out. First, is its intensity, verse 1. He says, "For I would that ye knew what great conflict," in my King James translation. That word "conflict" is related very closely to the word striving. If you back up one verse into Colossians 1:29, remember there's no chapter/verse breaks in the Bible, where Paul says, "Whereunto I also labour,"—and here's our word—"striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." We looked at Paul's ministry and said that Paul labored and he was striving. The word "striving," is the word *agonizomai*, we get our word agonize from it. Paul says, "I want you to know that I'm agonizing over you. I'm struggling over you." Some translations have, "I'm struggling over you," so Paul loved them, but Paul was separated from them and the false teachers were among them, nothing could be worse. He wasn't there with them to be able to protect them, he had to write this letter to them from his house arrest or prison in Rome. That's the pastor's worst nightmare is not to be with his congregation and to think that wolves—false teachers—had come in among the flock and were devouring God's people.

That's the kind of thing that . . . I call them pastoral nightmares, you just wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat and some false prophets in your pulpit preaching heresy, and you can't get up there or turn the mic off or get to them. I'm actually describing dreams that I've had sometimes. You're just trying to get on the stage to try to put a stop to this false teacher, and you can never quite get up there, so pray for me.

"I want you to know," Paul says, "the conflict that I have for you. I'm striving for you." In what way did Paul agonize or strive over them? It was a struggle I believe that he engaged in prayer. Paul was not there among them. Notice he said, " . . . and for as many as have not seen my face." Paul had never been to Colossae. It was in the Lycus Valley. He had never been there, so someone else had started the church probably from other ministries that Paul had. He had never been there, but he loved them so much. He had a love for God's people that he hadn't even been there and been a part of their congregation, but he cared for them with a shepherd's heart. He was no doubt, I believe, praying for them.

Now, the text doesn't say that Paul prayed. There are places in Colossians where he clearly was praying, but I believe that what he's saying is his prayer petition or his heart of prayer. You

can almost take this text and say that this was Paul's prayer for the believers in Colossae. I believe he was intensely praying for them. I believe that we should remember that when there's nothing that we can physically do to help somebody, the best thing we can do to begin with is to get on our knees and pray for them.

Notice the heart of Paul's concern or agony in verses 2, 3. He says, "I want you to know that I'm conflicted, I'm struggling over you." He mentions Laodicea, which is one of the churches in Asia that the book of Revelation was written to, Revelation 3:14, and " . . . as have not seen my face in the flesh," but notice the heart that Paul had, "That their hearts might be comforted,"—this is in the form of a desire, a prayer, or a petition—"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; 3 In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Paul's prayer for them was intense; Paul's prayer for them was from his heart.

Paul prays for several things. He prays for their encouragement. Look at it with me, verse 2, "That their hearts might be comforted," stop right there. That word "comforted" is from the same word that we get for the Holy Spirit called the Comforter. He's called the Comforter, which in the Greek is *paráklētos*. It literally means one who comes alongside another to strengthen and encourage them. In this and other places of this text Paul is no doubt praying for the Holy Spirit to come to the believers and to make His presence known among them to strengthen them and to comfort and to help them and no doubt give them courage and strength in the face of the dangers that they were going through. He wants them to be encouraged and comforted by the Holy Spirit. We have the Holy Spirit with us at all times to comfort and strengthen us.

Secondly, Paul prayed for their endearment, and I love this, verse 2, " . . . being knit together in love." So, "I want you to be encouraged and be comforted by the Spirit of God, and I want the Spirit of God to produce love for you to have for one another," " . . . being knit together in love," being joined together in love.

The mark of a Spirit-filled church is a loving church. Amen? Jesus said, "By this,"—that is, love,—"shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." If we don't have love for one another, then we are not true disciples of Christ. This "knit together" phrase is a medical metaphor. It's joining or uniting together. It was used for the healing or mending of a broken bone.

I thank God I've never broken a bone. I hear it's pretty painful, but I figured that if I ever did break a bone, I'd want them to put me out for a couple of months. If you're going to set it, set it when I feel no pain. I'm not into pain. This restoring of that which is broken and disjointed, being put back together, I love that picture.

In Ephesians 4:11-13 it tells us that God, " . . . gave some . . . pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry . . . Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God," and that we are knit together and built up together in Christ. The same phrase there is used as being knit together, so he gave them

encouragement, the comfort of the Spirit, and the prayer for endearment that you love one another.

Let me tell you, if you want to have a healthy, vibrant, growing, strong Christian life, love God's people by being knit together with them. Don't be a lone-ranger Christian. I don't know how many old folks remember the television show, "The Lone Ranger." There are too many lone-ranger Christians, "Just me and Tonto, that's all I need," kind of a thing. No, we need the body of Christ. We need to be part of a Christian family. We need to love one another. We need to pray for one another. We need to serve one another. We need to wash one another's feet. It's so important for us to be knit together in love. This is Paul's prayer and heart for this church, to be joined together as the family of God.

Paul prayed for them to have enrichment, verses 2, 3. Let me unpack that for you. Look at verse 2. He says, ". . . and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding." If there's anything that God wants you to have as a believer is assurance and understanding of who God is and of your salvation. I believe that God wants us to have full assurance. Notice verse 2 as well, ". . . to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ," so that you grow in your knowledge of the Word. The Holy Spirit comforting you, the love of the fellowship strengthening you, and the Word of God by the Spirit of God informing and teaching you about the things of God and of the mystery of Christ. You must be growing in your knowledge of God.

Notice verse 3, "In whom," referring to Christ at the end of verse 2, "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." You should underline that verse, you should highlight that verse, and you should put it to memory. In Christ are hidden, "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Now, this is where you get a clear sense of Paul defending them from the false teachers known as Gnostics because the word gnostic comes from the word $\gamma\acute{\nu}\omega\sigma\kappa\alpha\iota$, or to know. They were a group that claimed to have a deeper knowledge, a greater wisdom that was beyond Christ and beyond Scriptures, and that they would initiate you into their group and give you this superior knowledge. What they were teaching was a form of Jewish legalism, Eastern mysticism, and Greek philosophy. It was a compilation of all these different ideas, but it wasn't Christ. The same thing exists today. People want you to go down this path or down that path or follow this teacher, get into this doctrine, and they lead you away from the simplicity that is in Jesus Christ. It's so important for us to keep our focus on Christ and not be led astray by false teachers.

The word "wisdom" is the word $\sigma\phi\acute{\iota}\alpha$, we get our word knowledge, and that's where we get our word $\gamma\acute{\nu}\omega\sigma\kappa\alpha\iota$ or to know. This is what the Gnostics, the false teachers, were claiming that they had this hidden wisdom, this hidden knowledge, that Paul says it's all found in the Person of Jesus Christ. Notice it's hidden in Christ, so you have to desire it, you have to seek it out, you have to plumb the depths of God's Word. You have to know who Christ is. I so encourage you to study your Bible and to get to know the Person and work of Jesus Christ, to Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace. You, as a Christian, should have a knowledge of who

God the Father is, who God the Son is, as well as also God the Holy Spirit. This knowledge is hidden in Christ.

Notice, as it says there, it's found in a Person, Jesus. It's not found in a religion, so you can search out all the different religious paths you want, but you'll not find the true knowledge of God, it's found in Christ. It's not found in the system of beliefs, it's found in the Person of Jesus Christ. Listen to what Charles Erdman in his commentary 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 are to be guided are all stored up for them in Christ." So, all that we need, all that we should hold, all that we should be grounded in are found in one place, found in the Person of Jesus Christ. So, you don't need to go anywhere else, you don't need to seek anything else, you don't need to graduate beyond Christ into the 'deeper life club.' He that has Christ has all the fullness of the Godhead at his disposal.

Why is that? Well, notice the motivation that Paul had in his concern. What motivated Paul to be concerned about them, verses 4, 5? He said, "And this I say,"—what he said in verses 1-3—"lest any man should beguile you with enticing words." He says, "Everything I just finished saying, I had a reason for. The reason behind it, the motive behind it, was some are trying to beguile you with enticing words." Verse 5, "For though I be absent in the flesh,"—I'm not there with you in Colossae—"yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith." We would say, "I'm not there with you, but I'm there in my heart. I'm with you in my heart, and I want you to be careful because there are some who would try to beguile you." So, "And this I say, lest any man should beguile you."

The word "beguile" means to deceive by false reckoning. Notice Paul uses the phrase "enticing words," which actually is persuasive arguments. You know, there are sometimes I'm so amazed at how talented false teachers are at twisting the Scripture to say what they want. It's just unbelievable. I don't know how they do that. I don't know how they think about that. I don't know how they get there. True preaching is always bound to the text and the meaning of the text and conveying what the text says and what it means. False preaching, false teachers, impose or transpose into the text what they want it to say, so they take it out of context or they actually add to the text or they omit from the text, but they certainly don't interpret it in its historical, grammatical, theological context.

If you want to be a good listener to good preaching, you should ask yourself, "Is that what it says, is that what it means, and is that how it should be applied?" I've listened to other people preach quite often and I'm thinking, Well, for beginners, that's not what the text means, and because he missed the meaning of the text, he missed the application of the text, so his sermon is using the text as a pretext. You might as well go somewhere else, find a text that says what you want it to say, or just say, "This isn't from the Bible, but I just want to share it with you," and get up and talk. A lot of times that's all a sermon is, and they kind of throw in their ideas with Scriptures to kind of justify, "This is preaching just because I'm quoting Scripture." Just because they're quoting Scripture doesn't mean it's biblical what they're saying or what the text means.

You can tell I just wrote a book on preaching, right? If I had a soapbox right now, I'd jump up on top of one. This is one of my 'soapbox' verses, ". . . lest any man should beguile you with enticing,"—persuasive—"words." "Oh, but they're such good speakers." I'm all for that. "They have such dynamic stories." I'm all for that. Sometimes I call them skyscraper sermons—story on top of story, on top of story, on top of story, on top of story. It's captivating and it's fun to listen to, but it's not biblical. Sometimes when you ask somebody ten minutes after the sermon, "What was the sermon about?" "I don't know, but it was sure good."

When you take a person into the text when you preach, then they're learning the Bible and it sticks in their brain. If you need to know what the sermon was about, go back and read the Scriptures. Go read the text, and it all comes back to your remembrance. So many false teachers today . . . you don't need Gnostics, all you need to do is turn on the television. Now, they're not all false teachers, but many of them are teaching false doctrine that is not truly in the Word of God. So, they're beguiling them, deceiving by false reckoning, and the same is true today.

In 2 Timothy 4, Paul told his protégé, Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season,"—preaching the Word means—"reprove, rebuke, exhort with longsuffering,"—patience—"and doctrine." He told them why he should preach the Word, "For the time will come,"—this time has come—"when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." Paul said to Timothy, "But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." That mandate, that charge, is still applicable today for every pastor who loves his people, and they should never waver from that whether it's popular, whether it's en vogue, whether it's in season, whether it "grows the church" or not numerically, be faithful to preach the Word because a faithful undershepherd is going to give an account to the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and He will judge the living and the dead. So don't get influenced just because of their persuasive words or arguments.

Notice, again, in verse 4, "enticing words" or persuasive speech, write down 1 Corinthians 2:4, I love it. Paul says, "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." It's believed from that and other verses that Paul was not an eloquent speaker, but he was a man who preached the Word of God and preached the truth and revealed the mysteries of God and Christ. Paul expresses his confidence in them in verse 5, closing off this first section, "For though I be absent in the flesh,"—Paul wasn't there—"yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith." Paul was confident of them even though he was concerned about them and the false teachers had come into the church, so he says, "I'm confident of you." He wants them to be steadfast.

That word "order" and "steadfastness" are both military terms, so he's picturing the church here as an army, and he doesn't want us to fall out of rank. He wants us to be a cohesive unit and to go forward in the truth of the gospel.

Now, in verses 6, 7, as we wrap this up, Paul then gives them his charge. In verses 1-5, he gives his concern, its intensity, its heart, its motivation; and then he charges them. I love these closing verses. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord,”—notice the ‘therefore’ in verse 6. Everything he says in verses 1-5 is put into shoe leather, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.” The “walk” there is live in Him. The Christian life starts with receiving Jesus as Lord.

I want to just say real quick in a footnote. You may not even know what I’m talking about, but there are some brethren preaching, and I’ve seen in on the internet, that are putting down this idea of receiving Jesus as your Lord and Savior. They say you must repent, believe in Christ, but they don’t like the word “receive” and it’s just another term used for when you believed, when you trusted Christ, when you put your faith in Christ, and it’s a biblical term, a legitimate term. Usually they do that to get down on the idea of a sinner’s prayer, “There’s no sinner’s prayer in the Bible,” they say, “and you shouldn’t lead people in a sinner’s prayer, and you don’t tell people they need to receive Christ.” Well, Paul says that right here in our text, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord,” you trusted in Him as your Lord and Savior. In John’s gospel it says, “But as many as received him, to them gave the power,”—which means the right or the authority—“to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name,” so they received Christ.

Another verse, 1 Corinthians 15:1, says that Paul’s preaching the gospel and says, “. . . which also ye have received,” so you receive the gospel, you receive Christ, you put your faith in Him, John 3:16, you believe in Him, it’s all conveying the same concept. I don’t know really what they’re trying to convey or what they’re talking about. I think it’s kind of crazy.

Now, Paul tells them he wants them to walk in Christ, verse 6. That’s the theme of his conclusion and exhortation—live in Christ, walk in Christ, be grounded in Christ. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.” What does it mean to walk in Him? It means to live in Christ, Christ who is our life. Amen? We live in Christ; we walk in Christ.

Paul gives us four word pictures that describe the believer’s walk, and we’ll go back over this perhaps next Wednesday. I hate to race through it, but write them down. They’re beautiful pictures. You know, you’re told not to mix metaphors when you write, but Paul didn’t care. He mixes his metaphors. Notice what Paul does. He gives us a picture of a tree in the word “rooted,” verse 7. The Christian life starts with receiving Jesus Christ as Lord, and then it starts the life of walking with Him. If you want to see the Christian life, it’s in verses 6, 7—you receive Christ, you live and walk in Christ—and then what do you need? You need to be rooted in Him. This is an agricultural picture of a tree. How healthy can a tree be if it doesn’t have a strong root system? How strong can a tree be if it has a shallow root system? Do you know what the most important part of a tree is? Its roots, right? You can have a big, beautiful tree, if it has no roots, the minute the wind blows it topples over. A lot of Christians are not rooted in Christ and when the least trial or opposition or false teacher, Ephesians 4, “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.”

Do you know what a tumbleweed is? Sure, you live in California. Too many Christians are tumbleweeds—they're just rolling here, rolling there. Every new wind of doctrine that comes through the church, they roll over here, they roll over there, they roll over here, they roll over there. They're not rooted in Christ, so that when all these fads come drifting through the church, they don't get swept up or swept off by them. Get your roots deep into Jesus and the Word of God. Read Psalm 1, the blessed man planted in the Word of God, whose leaf shall not wither, everything he does is prospering.

The second picture is that of a building, "built up." The first word is, "rooted;" the second word is, "built up." So, you receive Christ, you walk in Christ, you get rooted in Christ, and then you get built up in Christ. This is by reading God's Word and studying the Scriptures and getting built up strong in Him. If you want to be a strong Christian, rooted and built up, then you need to be in the Word of God. This is a picture of a building built on a solid foundation. Jesus said, "The wise man builds his house upon the rock," right? That rock is what Christ said, "My Words," and being obedient to that. Notice it's, " . . . built up . . . and stablished in the faith." This is not your personal, subjective individual faith in God, this is the faith, the body of truth of Christianity, that we believe and that we hold to which Jude was talking about when he said, " . . . earnestly contend for the faith." If you don't know what "the faith" is, how do you earnestly contend for it? What is essential orthodox Christianity, you must be built up and established in that.

Notice, thirdly, Paul uses a picture of a school, verse 7, " . . . as ye have been taught," learning about Jesus in the Bible. Every Christian is to be a student of Scripture. When I was in school, that's the second thing I have nightmares about. I'm back in high school. It's just classic back in high school nightmares—I forget where my locker was, I'm late for a class. Then, I don't know the combination. I get to my locker and finally open it up and there's nothing in it. I'm in class, I have no books, no paper, and the teacher asks me a question and I have no clue what's going on. I just described John Miller in high school. I wake up in a cold sweat.

But then I got saved, and now I love to study! I have books galore. I didn't read until I got saved. I literally did not read until I got saved, and that was when I graduated from high school. I don't know how I got through school, but I did. I kind of just faked my way through. Don't let your kids listen to this sermon, "Well, Pastor Miller never read when he was in school. It turned out good for him." Getting saved, I learned to read; and learning to read, I read the Bible. When I got saved, I couldn't stop reading the Bible. My parents, who were believers, knew I was saved because I never came out of my room. I was just studying the Bible. They were so excited, "John's studying the Bible! Praise the Lord!" A life transformation took place. So, if you're going to be a growing Christian, you must be a student of the Word. You must be taught in the Word of God.

Here's the fourth metaphor picture, that of a river overflowing its banks. This is seen in the phrase, " . . . abounding therein with thanksgiving." This was used of a river that overflowed its banks. So, here's the picture: rooted, grounded, growing, grateful Christians. Notice how he ends in verse 7, " . . . abounding,"—overflowing—"with thanksgiving." We'll never be deceived or

led astray. So, we receive Christ, verse 6; we walk in Christ, verse 6; we get rooted and grounded in Christ, verse 7; you are built up in Christ, verse 7; and you overflow with Christ in thanksgiving, verse 7, the overflow of a grateful heart. You're not going to be led astray if you're rooted, grounded, growing, and thankful for Christ.

What should we be thankful for? That He died on the cross to forgive our sins and to give us eternal life. Amen? Let's pray.