

Series Colossians

This Message You Have Everything When You Have Christ

Scripture Colossians 2:1-7

Today we move into chapter 2 in our study of the letter written by the Apostle Paul to the believers in the city of Colosse. In the beginning of this letter, Paul expressed his thankfulness to God for the response of the believers to the gospel message. He had “heard about their faith in Christ Jesus and of the love they had for all the saints” (*Colossians 1:3-4*). Paul wanted the believers to know that he prayed regularly for them, “asking God to fill them with the knowledge of his will” in order that “they may live a life worthy of the Lord and would please Him in every way” (*Colossians 1:9-10*).

In chapter 1 Paul reminded his readers of the essential aspects of the gospel message, which they first heard from the evangelist Epaphras. Paul also described his calling and authority to guide the believers to the goal of every one of them becoming “perfect in Christ.”

Paul wanted to protect the believers in Colosse from some false teaching which was making the rounds among the church fellowships of Asia Minor. This is why, early in the letter, he provided an incredible amount of information about the person of Jesus. He wanted them to recognize that Jesus was the perfect, supreme, and completely adequate Reconciler to bring together a holy God and sinful humanity.

Paul wanted the believers to stay focused only on Jesus. He did not want them to get sidetracked in their faith walk. Paul was aware that teachers who were not speaking the truth of God’s word had come to Colosse, claiming that there were essential aspects in the gospel message which had not yet been preached to them. One of Paul’s objectives in this letter was to alert the Colossian believers to the spiritual danger they were in if they paid attention to these false teachers. He wanted the believers to firmly hold on to the faith they had originally and exclusively placed in Christ.

Chapter 1 laid the foundation for the main theme and emphasis of the letter. Throughout chapter 1 Paul was very tactful about what he said. He kept his words positive. Beginning in chapter 2, however, he began to use a more direct approach regarding the concern which was on his heart. Beginning with today's passage, Paul's writing became a mixture of instruction and warning. He wanted his readers to think about some specific theological ideas which were incorrect and what believers must do to avoid such theological errors. The passage today is a transition to that new theme.

Read Colossians 2:1-7

In the immediately preceding passage (1:24-29), Paul described his concerns and efforts on behalf of the Church universal. In the verses we just read Paul expressed his concern for two specific church fellowships, the ones in Colosse and Laodicea. These two cities were located close to each other, only about 12 miles apart. Paul had a special concern for the believers in these two cities and so he "exerted" himself strenuously on their behalf, as he did for others whom he had never met personally.

Paul was very specific about the reason for his concerns. He wanted his readers "to be encouraged in heart and united in love." The goal of the encouragement and the uniting was that all the believers would "have the full riches of complete understanding in order that they may know all about Christ."

Verse 2 is actually a restatement of information we thought about last week concerning the "mystery" of God. In the New Testament, the mysteries of God were mysterious only to non-believers. After a person was indwelt by the Holy Spirit, there were all kinds of glorious truths that became understandable. The most glorious truth of all is that Christ dwells in every believer.

This was the information that Paul was referring to in verses 2 and 3. Since Christ is in the believer and, since "all the treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ," the obvious conclusion is that believers have everything they need when they have Christ.

These thoughts represented a direct attack on the false teachers who, Paul knew, were not convinced about the all-sufficiency of Jesus. We won't get into the details of the false teaching, but one of the errors was the assertion that people had to meet certain human requirements before they could be assured of eternal life. They questioned the truth that all authority in heaven and on earth had been invested in Jesus by God the Father, and that all the fullness of God dwelled in Jesus.

Many of the false teachers claimed to have a special kind of spiritual wisdom — a higher knowledge than that possessed by ordinary believers, and they urged the believers to add to their faith in Christ by seeking that new kind of wisdom.

To counter this, Paul stated forthrightly that it was in Christ that “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden” and that believers had access to all the treasures that Christ possessed. This was a very strong statement specifically intended to counter the claims of the false teachers.

Paul probably used the word “hidden” because the false teachers frequently used that word to describe their special knowledge. The false teachers insisted that they were the only people to know the secret things of God. However, Paul gave the word “hidden” a completely different meaning. He had previously written that “the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations ... is now disclosed to the saints” (*Colossians 1:26*). What was previously “hidden” was revealed by the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ. Remember the statement in the passage last week: among the glorious riches of God's mystery is the truth that Christ is in the believer, and that this is the hope of glory.

Paul did not want his readers to be confused by the false teachers, nor for their faith in Christ to be weakened, nor for their fellowship to be divided over doctrinal differences. Paul wanted the readers to hold on to the truth that had originally been preached to them, and to stand strong against teaching that contained error. He wanted them to know that the fullness of the Word of God was in Christ and that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge were already available to every believer without the need for anything to be added.

In verse 4 Paul clearly stated the reason for his concern: “I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.” The Greek word for “deceive” means to lead astray by giving incorrect information or by presenting illogical reasoning. The false teachers must have had an appealing style of presenting their ideas, their arguments were “fine-sounding,” but Paul stated that their information was fraudulent and deceitful.

Paul was many miles from Colosse and Laodicea when he wrote this letter, but “in the spirit” he was with the believers in those cities. Paul had an amazing comprehensive interest in the level of spiritual maturity of all church fellowships throughout the Roman world. He eagerly solicited information about the fellowships where he had personally ministered, and he was just as concerned about the spiritual status of other fellowships that he learned about from reports which were brought to him by individuals like Epaphras. Paul was greatly concerned about the faith development of every believer, and he occasionally sent representatives on trips to observe and to bring him information.

In verse 1, Paul mentioned his “struggles” for all these fellowships which were scattered throughout the Greco-Roman world. “Struggles” might be a reference to prayer, because we know that Paul spent many hours praying that the truth of God’s Word would be firmly grounded in the lives of believers. Verse 1 may be a description of spiritual warfare. Paul knew that the powers of evil were strong, and that believers in many locations were opposed by Roman political authorities and Jewish fanatics. He also knew that false teachers were an evil influence in many church fellowships. His struggles would also include his active correspondence with many fellowships and individuals. Thirteen of his letters are in our New Testament, and I’m sure there were many others. And they were written in an age without computers, when letters were laboriously handwritten on scrolls and had to be hand-delivered to recipients.

At the end of verse 5 Paul expressed his confidence in the believers. “I delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.” Paul used sharp words in condemning false teachers but his words to believers were positive and softer in tone. Note that Paul emphasized their “faith in Christ.” Paul did not want his readers to put their faith in any teaching which was not exclusively “in Christ.”

The words, “orderly” and “firm” were military terms, words which described a well organized company of disciplined soldiers. Paul wanted the believers in Colosse to be like a well trained army in the midst of a battle — to be like soldiers who stay together, march in straight lines, maintain their confidence, and look out for each other. In order for these words “orderly” and “firm” to apply to the Colossian believers, their faith had to be exclusively centered in Christ.

Now we come to verses 6 and 7. Commentators do not know where to place these two verses in an outline of the letter. Many commentators think these verses are the beginning of a new section and they put a section break after verse 5. I am of the opinion that verses 6 and 7 are the application of the section we have been thinking about, that verses 6 and 7 explain how believers can be “orderly” and “firm in faith.”

First of all, Paul reminded his readers of how they “received Christ Jesus as Lord.” They had learned God’s truth from Epaphras, who was described as “a faithful minister of Christ” (*Colossians 1:7*). They had given evidence of their “faith in Christ Jesus” and demonstrated their “love for all the saints” (*Colossians 1:4*). The gospel was “bearing fruit and growing” among them (*Colossians 1:6*). They were qualified “to share in the inheritance of the saints” (*Colossians 1:12*) because they had been “rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son” (*Colossians 1:13*), and they had been reconciled by Christ’s physical body through death” ready to be presented to the Father holy, without blemish, and free from accusation” (*Colossians 1:22*). Their first steps in the faith had been exactly what they needed to be. Therefore Paul urged them to “continue to live in Him” with the same faith.

In verse 7 Paul used four participles to describe how to continue to live in Christ. The believers were to be “rooted in Christ.” The verb here implies a one-time, permanent placement and connection. “Built up in Christ” is present tense, indicating a process of growth and development. “Strengthened in the faith” is also present tense, indicating the need to become more and more confident and trusting in the object of faith. The final participle, “overflowing” is a favorite word of Paul. He uses it twenty-six times in his letters. Sometimes the word is translated “abounding.” It describes something that cannot be contained or controlled, like a river overflowing its banks or like unrestrained joy. In this case, life in Christ should continually “overflow with thankfulness.”

In these two application verses, Paul reminded the Colossian believers that they had been properly taught about faith in Christ, and that they had made a commitment to Christ by faith at the time of their conversion. Paul wanted their on-going faith to be centered on Christ Jesus as Lord just as it had been when they received Him. Paul knew that the Colossian believers would maintain a strong faith and not be deceived by false teachers if their lives were characterized by these four behaviors. In similar fashion, Paul wants us to keep our focus only on Christ and to continually walk and live in Christ. Paul knew that individuals who lacked a deep sense of thankfulness to God were especially vulnerable to doubt and spiritual delusion.

The point is, if we are rooted in Christ; and if, then, we grow and bear fruit in Christ; and if we become strong and mature in faith; then we will overflow with thankfulness because we will experience the fullness and all-sufficiency of Christ.