

Colossians 2 pt. 1 v1-10

We now enter into chapter two of Colossians and unsurprisingly we find that Paul continues to focus on Christ as the center of his every endeavor.

Interestingly enough, there is some shared language between the last verse of chapter one and the first verse of chapter two (bear in mind that chapter breaks were added to the text much later).

In Col 1:29 Paul writes that he is, “**striving** (**ἀγωνιζόμενος, agonizomenos**) according to His [Christ’s] working...”

In Col 2:1 Paul writes that he has, “a great **conflict** (**ἀγῶνα, agona**),” for the Colossians and Laodiceans.

While it is not super apparent in the english translation, these two words - striving and conflict - share a common root word in the original language and reside in the same semantic domain.¹

¹ “ἀγωνίζομαι; ἀγῶνα, ὤνος *m*; πάλη, ἡς *f*. to engage in intense struggle, involving physical or nonphysical force against strong opposition—“to struggle, to fight.” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 495.

So then, it appears that Paul has quite intentionally chosen his words, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, to progress the thought that he feels some sense of obligation to fight for the Colossians; and within him lives this struggle for the church - even though he had not met them face to face.

Before we dig into the remainder of the text we should take time to consider the impact that this sense of striving for the church ought to have on the lives of Christians across the globe!

Paul had not met these people personally but he knew, based on their reputation and the reports of others, that they were believers. The great conflict he experienced on their behalf was not **AGAINST THEM** but **FOR THEM**.

Sadly, many churches and many christians have embraced a competitive culture where we believe that we are striving against other churches to gain market share or advance our own position or agenda. That can be even more easy to engage in and certainly more palatable for local churches when we find that we disagree on minor doctrinal issues with those “other, weird” churches in our community.

BUT, Paul's conflict was FOR these churches. The competition he waged was on their behalf. Paul wasn't worried about building up his own brand or dominating the church landscape. He wasn't trying to rule over them like some authoritarian dictator, or own them or dominate them. The sense we get from Paul's writings is that he was devoted to the gospel in such a way that called the churches to hold fast to the core of their shared faith - Jesus Christ.

That is what we see in the following verses - a call to the center of our faith, Jesus. And I pray that is the heart that the Lord Jesus would give us by His Holy Spirit. That we might compete for the saints no matter what church they go to, insofar as we agree on the gospel message.

We are not to be competing with one another - we are all in this fight to advance the kingdom together.

Inasmuch as we agree on the foundational and transformational center of the gospel let us endeavor to strive for one another, not against one another. Let us not divide what was meant to be united. Let us build one another up as we keep Jesus Christ at the center of our efforts.

V.1-3 Is one grand Pauline sentence that furthers the ideas we have introduced - that churches aren't competing with one another, but that we are competing for one another.

Paul is concerned for the whole church, even those who are personally unknown to him. He not only addresses the local saints in Colossae, but he also demonstrates a concern for their sister church in Laodicea. Laodicea was located just north of Colossae, and was considered a larger city. Paul mentions Laodicea five times in his letter to the Colossians even imploring them to share each other's mail!² Paul also wrote to the Laodiceans (a letter unknown to us and lost to time) and desired that the letters he wrote to each church should be shared with their sister congregation. (Col 4:16)

Paul wanted them to know of his striving, of this concern that he had for them. With so many other things going on their lives and so many other doctrines competing for their attention and their affection Paul wanted to let them know of his great concern for them, hoping that would result in a three-fold benefit in their lives: their hearts may be encouraged; they would be knit together in

² David Seal, "Laodicea," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

love; and they would gain all of the spiritual riches that come along with a full understanding of Christ.

Paul really had a heart to lift the saints up. There was certainly enough turmoil and chaos in the first century to cause any believer to be anxious, uncertain, or fearful. Paul addresses those common challenges throughout his writings, always with an encouragement. (Rom 8:15; Phil 4:6; 2 Tim 1:7) It is a blessed call to encourage the hearts of others! And there is always a need!

Paul desired unity among the saints, that they would be “knit together in love.” Or, as the original language suggests (συμβιβάζω, *sumbibazo*), “to bring together into a unit...unite.”³

The bond of that unity, what ties us to one another is love. This is indeed challenging. We live in an age where we saints are quite fond of constructing escape routes and quick off-ramps relative to our church experience. Very often church is a place we visit, not an organism we are tied to. But where one finds a body of believers who are committed to one another, knit together by love, that is to find a truly special thing, and a biblical thing.

³ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 956.

AND in that, as the Colossians and Laodiceans grew in their love for one another they would certainly find in their collective journey of sanctification that Christ holds “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Christ is the one who causes unity, love, and understanding. All of those blessed things we long for as a church community begin and end in Christ.

Do you find yourself desiring to grow in your theological understanding, or at least to be theologically sound? Look to Jesus. Do you desire to be wise? Look to Jesus. Do you desire to be more loving? Look to Jesus. Do you desire abundant peace and stability? Look to Jesus. Press into Him, mine the riches found in the person and work of Jesus Christ - you can never exhaust them. (Rom 11:33; Eph 3:8)

The temptation for the Colossians, and for us, is to abandon our excavation of the person and work of Jesus in favor of something else that appears flashier, newer, more exciting - typically dealing with subject matter that is far less developed or knowable and far more open to individual interpretation.

The danger is that what we typically find in chasing after other knowledge, understanding or wisdom tied to peripheral,

ambiguous doctrines is that our human understanding of those things is quite shallow, becomes exhausted quickly, and hasn't really done much to encourage, build up or bind up in love, nor has our digging in that shallow dirt really made us anymore like Jesus.

Jesus Christ must be the main thing. The overwhelming, inexhaustible result of digging into Christ consistently and faithfully, is a vast treasury of understanding and knowledge of the grandest message ever presented to mankind - the gospel, the mystery of God.

V. 4 Paul plainly states his purpose for focusing so strictly on the work of Jesus so far. To this point Paul has not deviated in his discourse from dealing with Jesus Christ. Quite matter of factly Paul wants the readers/hearers of this letter to understand what their focus should be. AND, to ensure that they are measuring what they hear in their community, those persuasive words meant to deceive, against the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“The verb “to deceive” is used elsewhere only in James 1:22, and means “to convince by false reasoning, to delude, mislead, lead astray.”⁴

Douglas Moo remarks about this portion of Colossians, “The theology, and especially the high Christology, of 1:1–2:3 has, then, a direct practical purpose: to keep believers from being deceived by fine-sounding arguments...So for us: paying too much attention to fine-sounding arguments can deceive us about religious and spiritual truth. Paul has no doubt about the vital importance of spiritual truth, and he knows how perilously easy it is for believers to be led astray by high-flown rhetoric (or, in our day, by “multimedia presentations”). The antidote for such false teaching is the “cogent proof” of Christ’s absolute supremacy and exclusivity.”⁵

Jesus must be the center! That simple truth, Jesus as our eternal compass bearing, will keep us from being deceived.

Bear in mind that part of what makes deception possible is how cleverly crafted, and convincing the proposed deception appears

⁴ Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 47.

⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 172.

to be. It seems ALMOST right - but we must ask, how does it square with the gospel? How does it square with the person and work of Jesus?

Is it some argument that proposes to take attention away from the main thing - the gospel of Jesus Christ? Is it some argument that proposes to add to the gospel of Jesus Christ? Is it some argument that seeks to obscure the gospel of Jesus Christ by “adding to” it, or taking away from it?

Christendom has seen all of these tactics and then some - all from WITHIN the church (as well as externally)! Do not be deceived! Keep Christ at the center.

Know how to spot those vain arguments and doctrinal disputes that are not focused on Christ. John Calvin helps us identify that in part when he writes, “For what is the reason why mankind have involved themselves in so many wicked opinions, in so many idolatries, in so many foolish speculations, but this—that, despising the simplicity of the gospel, they have ventured to aspire higher? All the errors, accordingly, ... must be reckoned as proceeding from this ingratitude—that, not resting satisfied with

Christ alone, they have given themselves up to strange doctrines.”⁶

V.5 Paul gives additional encouragement by letting them know that his presence is with them. Not in a weird, new-age, astral projection way -- but that his concern for them is real and they are on his mind and heart in a substantial way.

Just because they are geographically separated doesn't mean that they are dead to one another, nor divorced from one another. Far from it!

In fact a strong Scriptural argument can be made that the saints in Colossae, while distant from Paul (and any number of Apostles and churches), remained more profoundly and substantially connected and united with the Body of Christ, the universal church, because of a shared SPIRIT - THE HOLY SPIRIT. This remains true for us today!

And for Paul, his language indicates to us, that in his present physical separation he still very much rejoiced actively and saw actively their good order as a church (probably from Epaphras,

⁶ John Calvin and John Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 176.

the proposed founder of the church - Col 1:7; 4:12), and their steadfastness to the fundamental tenets of the gospel - faith in Christ.

Paul continues in this vein - encouraging them to remain steadfast in their faith and to walk it out in their lives. BUT consider momentarily where this affirmation of their resolve, stability, and orderly faith is placed within the text -- right after warning them about being deceived.

The sense then is that they are doing well - they are stable and orderly, focusing on Jesus - but they must be on guard. (Eph 5:15-16) Paul had seen other churches that “ran well” but were hindered by clever sounding arguments and had unfortunately shifted the focus of the congregation towards something other than Jesus. (Gal 5:7)

V.6-7 So what? What’s the application?

Keep going! Additionally, there is not only an imperative for continued progress in Christ but an acknowledgement of a firmness from Christ.

We see the idea of a certain, grounded, strengthened, forged faith that has come through instruction in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

AND, as they continue to move out - to be strengthened - they are also instructed to give thanks as they continue to grow and abound in Christ. From this instruction we understand that the unified church of the saints is a community of people who are firmly anchored in Jesus, with no other spiritual goals but to be found diligently pursuing Jesus.

V.8 - The warning.

BEWARE - be teachable, be humble, be anchored in Jesus. We are not as smart as we think we are. Often, we are not as intellectually rigorous with the media presented to us as we believe we are. We certainly aren't as intellectually rigorous as we ought to be.

“A 2001 study titled *The Color of Odors* examined the effect of color on odor and taste perception of wines. In the experiment, wine experts were presented with two glasses of wine: one red and one white. Each was asked to describe the wine as they experienced it. The experts used words like *citrus, flower, lemon,*

and *honey* to describe the white wine, whereas they used words like *clove*, *musk* and *crushed red fruit* to describe the red.

However, all of the experts had been unwittingly duped: both glasses actually contained the same white wine, the only difference between them being a little red food coloring in one glass. Not a single expert was even able to identify that both glasses contained white wine, and they all described the colored white wine as they would have a red.”⁷

Cling to what you know for certain! Don't allow somebody to deceive you into indulging in emptiness. Paul uses the word “cheat” to describe the trade off - we're being robbed of our actual treasure for something that is hollow, meaningless, and has no benefit to the hearer if we choose to shift our focus to something other than Jesus.

Additionally we ought to beware of what we are engaging in! In our world where everybody has a platform to propagate lies as facts through slick marketing and presentation software we need to be very discerning.

⁷<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/brain-babble/201412/why-were-so-easily-fooled-and-why-it-matters>

Unfortunately we also need to ensure that if we are engaging in “Christian” media that we, like the Berean saints, search the Scriptures daily to find out if what is being said is absolutely true (Acts 17:11). Don’t just assume what you have heard or seen is true, there are many wolves out there in sheep's clothing seeking to manipulate God’s flock - search the Scriptures and see!

If this seems a little heavy handed, remember Paul’s exhortation to Timothy:

[1Ti 6:20-21 NKJV] “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane [and] idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge-- 21 by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace [be] with you. Amen.”

And again in 2 Timothy:

[2Ti 2:14-16 NKJV] “Remind [them] of these things, charging [them] before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. 15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing

the word of truth. 16 But shun profane [and] idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.”

V.9-10 Finally, Jesus is all you need.

In Him dwells all that God is. He is God with us, God in us.

If we are looking to supplement Christ with something else, we have lost our way. He is over all creation, all powers, all ruling authority and by Him we are made complete.

You don't need anything else except Jesus and then all of those spiritual riches, that He has promised are yours. Where we are lacking in our understanding and wisdom - Jesus promises that the Spirit Himself will be our teacher. (Jhn 14:26)

Don't let philosophy, smooth talk, marketing, etc frame your understanding of Jesus - since he is the head of ALL principality and power and over all things - allow Jesus to frame your understanding of those things.

We are complete in Him and must remain focused on Him. Do not be led astray but rather press into the riches of Christ and learn from Him. Be conformed to His image and you will certainly find joy as you walk in His Spirit, in His Kingdom.

Be encouraged, loved one, Christ IS the center.