

Colossians

chapter 2



E. PAUL'S INTENTION (2:1-5)

(i) Intercession for the Church (2:1)

Colossians 2:1

¹I want you to know how much I have agonized for you and for the church at Laodicea, and for many other friends who have never known me personally.

Paul's agony for the church at Colosse was not merely restricted to a helpless concern, rather it was translated into prayerful intercession. As long as we can pray we are not helpless. As long as we can pray there is always hope, not just for our situation, but for others as well. Paul's praying was not some mere dutiful obligation which he carried out to fulfil other people's expectations of his apostolic responsibility. The fact that he *agonized* for the Colossians shows his deep care and concern for them. What's so amazing about this statement is that Paul had not even met the Colossians, or the Laodiceans who would later read this epistle.

(ii) Paul's goal for the Church (2:2-3)

Colossians 2:2

²My goal is that they will be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love. I want them to have full confidence because they have complete understanding of God's secret plan, which is Christ himself.

Just as in the first chapter, we have further clues as to what Paul prayed for when he prayed. In this verse we note that he prayed the following-

- For them to be encouraged
- For the church to be knit together with strong ties of love
- To have strong confidence (in their faith in Christ)
- Complete understanding of God's plan

Colossians 2:3

³In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

The Gnostics were claiming a hidden knowledge attainable through their religious efforts, but here Paul uses their language to show that all wisdom and knowledge (Greek *gnosis*) is hidden in Christ.



(iii) Paul's delight (2:4-5)

Colossians 2:4

⁴I am telling you this so that no one will be able to deceive you with persuasive arguments.

Paul's fundamental reason for writing this epistle is to counter the heresy being promoted by the Gnostics. He recognized that their arguments were very persuasive. Today, we must also be on guard against the persuasive arguments of deceivers and learn to compare all doctrine with the Word of God.

Colossians 2:5

⁵For though I am far away from you, my heart is with you. And I am very happy because you are living as you should and because of your strong faith in Christ.

Paul encouraged the Colossian church despite there being some elements of the church succumbing to heresy. There is a great lesson here for church leaders about not being too ruffled by problems, nor allowing minority agendas to totally preoccupy their attention and focus.

2. CHRIST HAS SET YOU FREE (2:6 - 23)

A. NEW LIFE (2:6 – 15)

(i) Grounded in Christ (2:6 – 7)

Colossians 2:6

⁶And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to live in obedience to him.

Since the Colossians had initially accepted the grace of God and His forgiveness for their sins, they should continue to walk in the grace and forgiveness of God, rather than being distracted by the error of the Gnostics. This verse reinforces the need for complete surrender and repentance at the point of salvation and acceptance of God's grace and forgiveness. How a person accepts Christ has a dramatic impact on the rest of their spiritual journey. If a person makes a half-hearted commitment to Christ it will seriously hinder their ongoing walk with the Lord. How we receive Christ is how we should continue. If we received Christ by humbly acknowledging our great dependence upon Him for our every need, we are well on the way to a fruitful walk with Him. Christ demands and deserves our complete obedience from the point of our commitment to Him.

Colossians 2:7

⁷Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him, so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all he has done.

Again the focus is on Christ, not some self-generated revelation or special knowledge achieved by observing ascetic religious principles. This verse shows us that true spirituality is a matter of being rooted in Christ; nourished by Christ; bearing fruits of faith, strength and truth. The original message of truth that they had received was what brought them the message of salvation, not the message of the Gnostics. When we realise what Christ has actually done for us, our lives *should* overflow with thanksgiving.

(ii) Christ makes us complete (2:8 – 10)

Colossians 2:8

⁸Don't let anyone lead you astray with empty philosophy and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the evil powers of this world, and not from Christ.

This is one of Paul's most direct statements against his heretical foes. We too must be guarding ourselves against teaching that sounds good, right, and reasonable, yet disagrees with the Word of God. What we sometimes fail to recognise but Paul states here plainly is that this high-sounding nonsense actually originates from the Devil (*the evil powers of this world*).

Colossians 2:9

⁹For in Christ the fullness of God lives in a human body,

Again Paul makes another plain statement about the divinity of Christ. Christ was not created divine, nor made divine, nor exalted to the level of divinity: *He is eternally divine*. That is, He has *always* existed as God. The Christ who walked the shores of Galilee did so in an authentic human body. He was *fully* God in the flesh. He did this without sinning, and thus proved that human flesh was not essentially corrupt or evil. The Gnostics had argued that human flesh was basically evil and needed to be disciplined through a series of ascetic practices.

This epistle repeatedly stresses Christ's lordship over everything. The Gnostics could not accept that Christ was in the flesh. They proposed that Christ might well have been God, but He could not have been God *in the flesh*; He must have been a visible, non-physical, manifestation of God (note 1John 4:2). Or perhaps they proposed that Christ was merely a created being who attained special knowledge. There are those today who also diminish the true identity of Christ. But if Christ was not truly God in the flesh then His sacrificial death on the cross has to be called into question since the Bible says that His death and resurrection gave Him absolute supremacy over everything in the universe including the last enemy: *death*.

²⁵For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. ²⁶And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷For the Scriptures say, "God has given him authority over all things." (Of course, when it says "authority over all things," it does not include God himself, who gave Christ his authority.) ²⁸Then, when he has conquered all things, the Son will present himself to God, so that God, who gave his Son authority over all things, will be utterly supreme over everything everywhere.
1Corinthians 15:25-28

Colossians 2:10

¹⁰and you are complete through your union with Christ. He is the Lord over every ruler and authority in the universe

"We are complete through our union with Christ" counters the heresy that we need to add something to our faith in Christ. The Gnostic argument that salvation could not be achieved without doing certain ascetic practices is renounced by this verse. Because Christ is supremely complete, all believers in union with Him are *made* complete.

The point also is this: *if Christ is Lord over every ruler and authority, and He says that we are complete, who is there to argue?*

(iii) True circumcision (2:11 – 15)

Colossians 2:11

¹¹When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. It was a spiritual procedure—the cutting away of your sinful nature.

Does a Christian need to be circumcised to be saved? Certain Judaizers were teaching that Christians still needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved. But Paul refutes this. In fact when someone comes to Christ, they are spiritually circumcised in much the same way that a Gentile becomes a true Jew when they come to Christ (Romans 2:29). Whereas circumcision cuts away the flesh, Christ has circumcised believers by cutting away their sinful nature.

Colossians 2:12

¹²For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to a new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.



Christian baptism is likened to Jewish circumcision. Just as circumcision sealed the Old Covenant between God and His people, so under the New Covenant water baptism seals the New Covenant between Christ and the believer. There are some segments of the Church that do not practice water baptism (such as the Salvation Army), or practice water baptism in the Biblically prescribed fashion of full immersion proceeding repentance and commitment to the Lord (such as those denominations that practice infant sprinkling). But if water baptism is the sealing of the New Covenant as Paul alludes to here, it is too important to ignore or tamper with.

A modern example of an ancient covenant would be marriage. The Bible also draws a parallel between marriage and becoming a Christian (Ephesians 5). Just as in a marriage there is a period of betrothal or engagement, which is then culminated in the wedding ceremony where the commitment of the two people is declared for the whole world to acknowledge, before the presence of witnesses, so becoming a Christian is also forming a covenant. When we give our lives to Christ we have agreed to a union with Him (an agreement to marry, similar to the Biblical term *betrothal*). At this point we belong to Christ and our names are recorded in the Book of Life. But just as in the forming of a marriage covenant, there is a formal public sealing of the covenant through water baptism (like the marriage *ceremony*). Just as a covenant is immediately celebrated by the parties involved over a covenant meal, so those who have sealed their covenant with Christ through water baptism are invited to the Lord's Table every Sunday to participate in a covenant meal.

Paul also says in this verse that water baptism *buried* us with Christ. When we are water baptised we are more than simply identifying with Christ's death, we are spiritually breaking from our past lives of sin. In the same way, when we come up out of the water, we are more than just identifying with Christ's resurrection, we are receiving new life through "*the mighty power of God*". Many people have testified to the transforming experience they received at the point of their water baptism.

Colossians 2:13

¹³You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins.

Baptism is only possible because Christ has forgiven us of our sins. Not just the sins we have already committed, but *all* of our sins. When the repentant come to Christ for forgiveness, He forgives *all* of their sins, past, present, and future. We need not plead with God everyday for the forgiveness of our sins once we have received forgiveness. When we slip and stumble in our walk with the Lord we are instructed to acknowledge our sin and confess it to Him.

⁹But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.

1John 1:9

When we start out on our journey with the Lord, our main priority is to die to our old nature (take up our cross and follow the Lord, Matthew 16:24). As we learn to walk victoriously over the sins of commission, our challenge is not to *die*, but to *live* in the new life that Christ has given us and walk victoriously over the sins of omission.

Without Christ in our lives, we cannot live a life where sin has been cut away from us. Only Christ can give us new life and forgive us of our sin. Despite the Gnostics teaching that new life and forgiveness were available via other means, this is just simply not true.



Colossians 2:14

¹⁴He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross.

When Christ died on the cross, He died for your and my sin. Sin brings with it a sentence of punishment and death. God the Father took our penalty, justly due to us for our sin, and placed it against the record of His Son. Christ then took all the charges that you and I have been proven guilty of, and nailed them to His cross where He died in our place for our sin to be atoned for so that we could stand innocently before God the Father. You cannot earn your forgiveness. You cannot buy your forgiveness. You cannot just hope that God will forgive you. You must acknowledge your sin, confess it, ask God for forgiveness, and thank Jesus that He died on the cross to bear the penalty for our sin once and for all.

Colossians 2:15

¹⁵In this way, God disarmed the evil rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross of Christ.

This verse implies that Satan was being foolish by considering that he could murder Christ on the cross and somehow hinder Him from achieving salvation. When Christ rose from the dead and thereby destroyed the last enemy: *death* (1Corinthians 15:26), He demonstrated His unquestionable authority over everything! As followers of Christ, we have nothing to fear from any devil, demon or foul spirit, for our Jesus has totally defeated them and given each of us the power to exercise His authority over them (Mark 6:7; 16:17-18).

B. DON'T BE DECEIVED (2:16 – 23)**(i) Christ is not religion (2:16 – 19)****Colossians 2:16**

¹⁶So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new-moon ceremonies or Sabbaths.

Man-made religion is concerned about the keeping of rules. It is possible to be very religious and very deceived and lost at the same time. Being a Christian is not necessarily being religious. There is a right sense to the meaning of religion that involves regularity of devotion. In this way, religiously reading the Bible, or religiously praying are good things, but religion based purely on rules, which attempt to appease others more than God, is deadly. Thus, you

can be a Christian and have differing opinions of other Christians on what Christians should eat drink, or days that you feel should be kept aside as sacred. Salvation is not dependent upon any of these things. And this verse is quite clear that we should not let anyone condemn us for not agreeing with them, or living up to (or down to) their particular religious opinions about these matters.

Colossians 2:17

¹⁷For these rules were only shadows of the real thing, Christ himself.

The purpose of the food laws and ceremonies was not to bring salvation, but to point to it. Each of the Old Testament sacrifices was a "type" of Christ. Each of the four annual Old Testament festivals foreshadowed the work of Christ. Each of the food laws pointed to God's desire for purity and separation for His people. They were not to be common or unclean by eating certain animals that notoriously scavenged off dead carcasses, or decaying food matters, or other animals whose flesh could cause disease in humans. All these things find their fulfilment in Christ. He is our Sacrifice. He is our Reason for celebration. He is our True Food.

Colossians 2:18

¹⁸Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on self-denial. And don't let anyone say you must worship angels, even though they say they have had visions about this. These people claim to be so humble, but their sinful minds have made them proud.

Christianity is not about being religious. While self-denial is healthy spiritual discipline, some people confuse its real purpose. Fasting for example is a form of self denial that Christ Himself practiced, and we surmise that the early Church also practiced fasting (2Cor. 11:27). But Christians do not *have to* fast in order to maintain their walk with Lord. There are some Christians who teach that we shouldn't watch TV, go to the Cinema, wear jewellery, take vacations, or participate in other activities that they feel are "worldly". This is one form of being religious.

Another form of religion that is competing with true Christianity is pseudo-mysticism. This sounds very authentic and sometimes even Christian. These people claim to have had visions, dreams, directive voices and even angelic visitations. Yet it is mostly a sham! Vulnerable and naive people are very prone to the claims and teachings of these people, and Paul was concerned that the Colossians were succumbing to this form of heresy.

While self-denial can be disguised as self-discipline, which is one of the most positive virtues a Christian can attain, humility is undoubtedly the most endearing of virtues. Therefore, when a heretic appears to be very spiritual *and* humble they are often both persuasive and appealing.

Colossians 2:19

¹⁹But they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For we are joined together in his body by his strong sinews, and we grow only as we get our nourishment and strength from God.

One of the tests of truth and right doctrine from an unknown teacher is whether they are connected to Christ. Being *connected to Christ* is to be in vital fellowship with His Body, the Church. When a teacher is not in fellowship with a local church, *and* a part of a broader network of peers, they are often susceptible to error, even though quite subtle. A teacher may appear to be humble, but if they are too proud to be in fellowship with peers who can challenge, correct, or care for them, they are to be viewed with great caution from the broader Body of Christ.

Paul's argument here is that these false teachers are not in fellowship with the recognised apostles and prophets, or churches in fellowship within the apostolic network. The Colossian church was in a vital connection with Christ via their leader's relationship with Paul and other apostles. Churches would do well to encourage and ensure that their leader is similarly in fellowship with his peers outside his local church and also with recognised apostolic ministries in and to the broader Body of Christ.

As we are all connected to the Church and those ministries that Christ has placed there, we are nourished and can draw strength from God through that connection. That is why church attendance is not an optional extra for the Christian, but a vital aspect to each of our spiritual journeys with the Lord.



(ii) Religion is man-made (2:20 – 23)

Colossians 2:20

²⁰You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the evil powers of this world. So why do you keep on following rules of the world, such as,

Paul's reference to the "world" here is not the people of the world, but the lifestyle of sin lived by those outside of Christ. The Christian is either of this world, or of Christ's Kingdom. To be *of the world* is to be engrossed in a lifestyle that does not honour Christ. Jesus prayed that His followers would be *in the world* but not *of the world* (John 17:14-15). When a person becomes a Christian they die to the lifestyle of the world and are made free from the evil powers of this world. What are the evil powers of this world? They are all the subtle forces that keep people blinded to the consequences of sin, and prolong the deception that they can live by any moral standard they set for themselves.

Therefore, if the world is full of evil powers why would anyone who has been set free from them want to go back into their deceptive clutches?

Colossians 2:21

²¹Don't handle, don't eat, don't touch."

These worldly rules sound impressive and even religious, but they are more than unnecessary, they are evil and dangerous. Religions based on man-made rules such as these: *don't handle, don't eat, or don't touch*, tend toward being a system of superstitions more than a religion. The false teachers were threatening to rob the Colossians of their freedom in Christ and drag them away from Christ into mere religion.

Colossians 2:22

²²Such rules are mere human teaching about things that are gone as soon as we use them.

Paul identifies religious rules as being merely human teachings rather than God ordained requirements. When you consider the various rules and regulations that many religions have, one has to wonder: *where did all these rules come from?* We in the Church would do well to ask the same question of the various religious rules that sneak into the Church. We too must guard against those who teach that salvation depends on keeping certain rules invented by men.

Colossians 2:23

²³These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, humility, and severe bodily discipline. But they have no effect when it comes to conquering a person's evil thoughts and desires.

The monks of the Middle Ages used to burn off a finger every time they had a lustful thought. A contemporary artist depicted these monks with a caricature of a monk with a stump left on one hand while he diligently burned his remaining finger on his other hand over a candle.

The issue of living a holy life is never derived from external rules. On the contrary, as Paul says here, these rules don't change a person on the inside. Holiness begins on the inside of a person with an internal decision, commitment and a desire to cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

Paul seems to warn us against being fooled by people who look spiritual and godly with their false humility, strong devotion to religious activity, and severe personal discipline. We should remember that Jesus spoke of practicing our devotion in a "secret place".