

Colossians chapter 2

Paul talks about having a great conflict about not having been to visit the church in Colossae and neighbouring Laodicea. Regret might be a better word than conflict. He really wants to visit every church in the world and give them encouragement and teaching. The church in Colossae and its sister church in neighbouring Laodicea seems to be doing really well despite not having a visit from Paul.

Paul's prayer is for the Colossians to have a more intimate knowledge of God and Jesus and in so doing -

[For my hope is] that their hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in [unselfish] love, so that they may have all the riches that come from the full assurance of understanding [the joy of salvation], resulting in a true [and more intimate] knowledge of the mystery of God, that is, Christ, Colossians 2:2 AMP.

So how does being knit together in unselfish love = the full assurance of understanding of the joy of salvation and a more intimate knowledge of the mystery of God and Jesus? How might this come about? - the word and the purposes of God. What is an 'intimate knowledge'? What is this 'mystery of God'? In God, in Christ there are hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge. What might they be?

One of Paul's motives for promoting this intimate knowledge is a defensive mechanism against false teachings and heresy. Romans 16:17-18. So whilst there's no direct criticism of this church, there are warnings. But there is also praise of the steadfastness of their faith?

In verse 4, Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. Colossians 2:4-5 NKJV

Paul seems to be hinting at a protective forcefield around the church. He's worried, he's concerned someone with high intellect and big charisma might come in and lead them away from the straight and narrow, what today we call an 'ism or a cult. He's also worried about the 'traditions of men' that we looked into earlier in Mark 7 (Boring Rituals).

In verse 5, Paul again is beating himself up about not being able to be with them. Though he gives them reassurance of his love and admiration of church discipline and the veracity of their faith in Jesus. In verses 6-7 there's more encouragement and affirmation, 'you have received Christ Jesus, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith'. What does he mean, rooted and built up in Him?' Maybe, put another way, 'born again' and add to that, thanks giving.

Verse 8, the first warning. Deceitful 'deep and meaningless' philosophy. We see this today on our televisions and YouTube from the USA. We can see crowds the size of a football stadium listening to preachers spouting perversions of the Gospel. There are two types, and you takes your choice. One preaches, in faith, give me lots of money and God will bless you and make you almost as rich as I am, all you have to do is believe in faith AKA 'the prosperity gospel'. The other preaches more like a life coach, believe and have faith and your life will be silky smooth. Little is said about the enemy, the battle within us, negative stuff like Satan and Hell. Just God is love and very fluffy. It's very wishy washy but on a big scale. It's a hybrid between the Gospel and the basic principles of the world. Following Jesus, abiding in Him and following His teaching doesn't feature.

The antidote to such deceit and heresy is V9, For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. We see Jesus, we see God, we strive to be like Jesus, we're being like God and as such V10 - and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. Yes, our God is in ultimate control of all principality and power (P&P) that's both spiritual worlds, good and evil. The Bible tells us that in His good time God will deal mercilessly with Satan and his followers. Ultimately, God is in total control.

V 11, talks about circumcision but in rather disparaging terms which given Paul's background is surprising. He describes himself as a Pharisee of Pharisees, Philippians 3:5, Acts 23:6, Acts 26:5. Let's look at the ritual called circumcision as set out in the Old Testament. Bear in mind that very few of the Colossian males will have been circumcised. The concept was first introduced in Genesis 17:10-14, it was part of God's covenant or deal with Abraham. For most males, the image of Abraham and his massive household performing that operation on themselves without anaesthetic brings a shudder just thinking about it, but for the Jews it became a badge, a sense of belonging to God as His special people. Because of that, they were able to look down on foreigners disparagingly as being 'The Uncircumcised' Judges 15:18, 1 Samuel 17:26, almost like lesser beings.

Paul became an opponent of what we call today, Messianic Jews; Jews who believed and followed Jesus, some of whom at that time were preaching that Christian converts should circumcise themselves. I'm sure that Paul could see that that would be a massive put off for many would be male Christian converts, Acts 15:1 & 24. Instead Paul moved the debate away from the genitalia and onto circumcision of the heart. This was not a new concept, look at Deuteronomy 10:6 and Jeremiah 4:4, this is explained better in Deuteronomy 30:6. Circumcision became a definition of purity, putting off the sins of the flesh. The New Testament replacement of circumcision is baptism. Baptism wasn't practised at all in the Old Testament, it was first introduced by God through the last Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist. When John baptised, he was getting the candidate to renounce a past sinful life and a readiness for the coming of the Messiah.

After Jesus's death and resurrection, baptism became an important ritual proclamation in which the candidate demonstrates that old sinful being has died and that the new born again person has been raised from that death to live a life of faith and obedience to God. V 12-13 Paul describes baptism as like a re-enactment of Jesus on the cross and being buried and rising from the dead.

V 14 &15 Paul expands these concepts of circumcision of the heart and baptism. Jesus wiped out the handwriting of requirements (God's law) that accused and condemned us and nailed it on the cross. Then Paul explained that when Jesus had finished his mission, then principalities and powers (go back to verse 10 for definition of P&P) God and Satan were disarmed, they no longer had any lethal weapons to be used against us. With the victory of the cross, Jesus triumphed and Satan was publicly humiliated. Romans 8:1-8.

V 16, more warnings. These go back to when we were looking at Mark 7, boring rituals of religion. This is expounding what we were talking about in chapter 1:22, being presented holy and blameless. We're no longer bound and condemned for breaking laws, rules, regulations and traditions. We don't need to go to specialist shops and pay extra because it's Kosher, we don't need to celebrate Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah), Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), Sukkot (harvest) Passover etc etc. The list goes on; Festival of New Moon (Rosh Choesh) which is non-scriptural and even the Sabbath. Strict Evangelical churches are strict observers of the Sabbath, you can go to church and read the Bible but not much else. Some Christians include Christmas and Easter into that list.

Paul says these were OK in their day but they've all been replaced by Jesus.

V 18. Amplified. Let no one defraud you of your prize [your freedom in Christ and your salvation] by insisting on mock humility and the worship of angels, going into detail about visions [he claims] he has seen [to justify his authority], puffed up [in conceit] by his unspiritual mind, and not holding fast to the head [of the body, Jesus Christ], from whom the entire body, supplied and knit together by its joints and ligaments, grows with the growth [that can come only] from God. Colossians 2:18-19.

Let no one defraud you of your prize, your freedom in Christ and your salvation by insisting on mock humility (monastic monks?) and the worship of angels (Catholic?) going into detail about visions [he claims] he has seen [to justify his authority], puffed up [in conceit] by his unspiritual mind (TV evangelists). I watched an interview with a TV evangelist who recounting a conversation he was claiming to have had with God, in a similar manner that Moses used to. He said that God asked him if he was pleased with his private jet and he'd replied yes he was very grateful. Then he claimed that God had asked him if he'd like an upgrade and of course He readily agreed and in faith he went out and bought a bigger, faster, better private jet.

Those are the people you've got to avoid. Instead, you've got to grow with the growth that can only come from God. What does grow with the growth mean? And how can that growth be stunted by the people above?

There's more people to avoid in verse 19 - ie: those, not holding fast to the head [of the body, Jesus Christ], from whom the entire body, supplied and knit together by its joints and ligaments, grows with the growth [that can come only] from God. Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Judaism and large parts of the wider church that have evolved to tell about 'all things bright and beautiful' and dropping the Gospel of Jesus's death and resurrection, our repentance and obedience and our victory as proved by our prize, our non-transferable, non-revokable ticket to Heaven.

V 20. This is the only slight criticism Paul makes of this church. Back to rules, regulations, rituals and traditions. Outwardly they seem very laudable, pious, sanctimonious (possibly) Pharasaical but they are of no value and don't impress God. He wants you to be happy and joyful, worshipping Him. He doesn't want you to suffer self imposed misery and affliction like Cistercian monks living lives of penance and atonement. Jesus has already done that for us - move on!