

## Colossians Chapter 2

Christ is the preeminent one. Christ is the sufficient one.

In the first fifteen (15) verses of this chapter, Paul argues that Christ is the sufficient answer to philosophy. The truth of Christ shows philosophy to be worthless – indeed dangerous.

In the remainder of the chapter, Paul argues that Christ is the sufficient answer to ritual. Ritual attempts to add something to the person and work of Christ. Paul proves that ritual is of no value in what it attempts to do.

Philosophy aims at the head.  
Ritual has to do with the heart.

Colossians 2:1-7

**Paul loved the church because he loved Christ.** He wanted the Colossians to know the great struggle he had on their behalf. The term struggle points to an intense strain – an “agony of a conflict”

Paul is struggling on their behalf - for their sake (v1)

But what is he struggling with? Certainly not the Greek like I do.

1. Possibly in his praying with fervent, anxious prayer. We see a similar use of the word in 4:12 when Paul writes of Epaphras who is, “struggling on your behalf in his prayers.” In other words, Paul wasn’t just “thinking about you today.” Part of the struggle he wants them to know is his praying. This is what the brother or sister in Christ does. And it takes effort and discipline.
2. He proclaims Christ (1:28). That too is very hard work. Everywhere, the proclamation of Christ is opposed.

Just as loving parents have goals for their children, Paul had goals for the church. He lists five of them in the first seven (7) verses.

- That their hearts would be encouraged
- That they be knit together in love
- That they have full assurance of understanding
- That they walk in Christ
- That they abound – or overflow- with thanksgiving

### **That their hearts would be encouraged (2:2a)**

When Paul expressed his desire that their hearts be encouraged, he was not referring just to their emotions. The biblical writers associated the emotions with “bowels”. Why? Because strong emotions produce physical reactions in the lower part of the abdomen. We understand this because we have all had butterflies in our stomach when we are anxious.

The emotions respond to what goes on in the heart, to what the mind *perceives*. This can be a problem if we are not careful because in a very real sense, our *perception* becomes our reality and we often respond to our perceptions in an improper way. The way to control our emotions, then, is through the mind. When the mind is filled with biblical truth, the emotions respond properly. Proverbs 4:23 reminds us to “watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life”

### **Knit together in love (2:2b)**

While Christianity is not mindless emotion, neither is it lifeless intellectualism.

Being knit together conveys the idea of being united, or bringing together. 1 Corinthians 12 reminds us all believers possess the same eternal life, all come to Christ in the same way, and all were placed into church by the same Spirit. The church's unity is not organizational, but familial.

We can only be knit together when we prefer one-another. Humility is the key that opens the door of love and unity.

### **Full assurance of understanding (2:2-5)**

Paul desires that the Colossians also experience all the treasure that comes from full assurance. Without that assurance, believers cannot enjoy all the blessings that are theirs in Christ. For example, no one can look forward with hope to the blessings of heaven if he is not sure he is going there.

Understanding refers to more than just having desire and knowledge. Paul ties it here to wisdom. Wisdom is knowledge rightly applied.

When it comes to applying biblical principles to our lives, **it is the exclusive property of Christians** because "a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor. 2:14).

Knowing the truth and acting upon it leads to all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

At the heart of this understanding, the Colossians and the Clearcreek Chapellians need to have what one author calls "a settled conviction" about Christ's deity and sufficiency. It is a matter of worldly wisdom versus Godly wisdom. Because Christ is sufficient, there is no need for the writings of any cult, philosophy, or psychology to supplement the Bible. He is the source of all true spiritual knowledge.

Why was this of concern to Paul? Why is this so important to us? So that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. If Christ really is all that Paul says he is; if Jesus truly is sufficient and preeminent, than it becomes extremely serious if we are deluded by something else. And don't we take the truth very seriously here? Of course we do.

So what would it take to delude us here at the Chapel? Plausible arguments, persuasive speech? Now listen. We will not be persuaded by unconvincing arguments. I am not worried about those. On the other hand, persuasive arguments sound plausible. They sound right. In fact this letter itself is a plausible argument, so they in and of themselves are not negative.

My concern in the church today is that many are being deceived by sheer eloquence. In order to "reach the lost" many pastors today have learned the power of skillfully-used words, manipulating the gospel to make it more palatable to the hearer. And in some cases they have replaced the gospel altogether with philosophy.

So you need to know and appreciate not only ministers of the Gospel like Paul, but the truth of the gospel and the truth about Christ himself. The advance of the gospel really does hang on that thin a thread!

Having warned the Colossians to continue to stand firm, Paul then rejoices that they are doing so in verse 5.

### **Walking in Christ (2:6-7)**

The importance of Christ in religion is widely acknowledged. Even groups that don't call themselves Christians generally regard Jesus as one of the world's foremost spiritual leaders. The problem comes when one confronts the precise claims which the Bible makes concerning Christ. He is not set forth as merely a religious figure. He is not presented as simply a visionary man often misunderstood, and from whom moral lessons can be learned. Christ is central to our true Christian faith and that point is clearly explained here.

**Therefore** brings into focus what Paul has just commended them for. Encouraged hearts, knit together in love, and reaching the full assurance of understanding make them able to now walk in him.

Walk refers to daily conduct. In this context it means primarily to continue believing the truth about Christ, not allowing their conviction to waver.

In broader terms, however, walking in Christ means abiding in him. It means to maintain a lifestyle patterned after his.

Like a tree with deep roots in rich soil, believers have been rooted (or potted) in him at the time of salvation and are now being built up in him. This building up connotes the process of becoming more and more conformed and transformed into the image of Christ. It is an ongoing and continuous action.

### **Abounding – or Overflowing- with Thanksgiving (2:7)**

Believers who are firmly rooted in Christ, being built up in him, and established in their faith, will overflow with gratitude to God. Praise completes the circle in which the blessings that flow to us from God return to him in the form of our praise and adoration.

By taking in the truth of the Word, believers get a strong mind. By living out those truths, they receive full assurance that Christ is who he claimed to be. With that confidence, they walk in him. As they walk in him, they will grow in him and become established in their faith. As a result, they will give praise to God.

### **Philosophy or Christ? Paul's Warning (2:8-10)**

Paul is concerned that those who have been freed from darkness to Christ's kingdom not become enslaved again.

Paul warned the Ephesian elders of the same thing in Acts 20. He told them that after he left savage wolves would come into the church, not sparing the flock, speaking perverse things.

Takes you captive literally means, "to kidnap," or "to carry off as booty, or spoil of war." It is unthinkable that those who had been purchased and redeemed should be fooled by ignorance. It grieves a pastor to learn of spiritual children who due to immaturity are susceptible to the danger of false teaching.

How does this happen? Verse 8 makes it very clear.

The philosophy of the Colossian false teachers and those who threaten the Chapelians was not what it appeared to be. It sounded good. It made sense. But it was complete illusion. There is no value in speculative human philosophy, no matter how deeply and profoundly religious it sounds.

And the sources for this foolishness are human tradition and the elementary principles of this world.

Human tradition is the first. Just because people have believed something and handed it down through the years does not make it true. Tradition usually serves merely to perpetuate error.

The second source for this false philosophy is the elementary spirits – or principles of the world. To the Colossians it referred primarily things that belonged in a series – such as numbers or to the letters of the alphabet. It literally means “things in a row.” It might also apply to mindless religious ceremonies. So Paul is saying these ideas are too simplistic for mature spiritual adults. To accept their teaching would be to descend, to regress from the mature teaching of Scripture to silly and childish thoughts.

But this is not according to Christ. He is not the source of its content. It could not and cannot be measured or explained by lining up its teachings with him. They do not match.

Why should the Colossians need a new philosophy or additional ceremonies? Christ alone possess everything essential.

Verses 9 and 10 are one of the most hallowed sections in all of Scripture. It presents the glorious majesty of Christ’s person and his complete sufficiency.

He alone has the power to save. Dwell means, “To settle down and be at home.” It is a present and permanent residence. The essence of deity continually abides at home in Christ. He is fully God forever. And as the one possessing all the fullness of deity, Christ is the head of all rule and authority.

“...and you have been filled in him...” indicates that the work has been done and our condition continues. Believers are in vital union with the very one who has already supplied them with all they could ever need to qualify them for God’s approval.

**And because of Christ’s complete sufficiency, he can and does offer a complete and full salvation. Look at verses 11-15.**

Every Jewish boy was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. It was the sign that he belonged to the covenant nation. Throughout Israel’s history there had been two schools of thought about circumcision. Some held that circumcision alone was enough to save, since it granted membership in the covenant nation. In Romans 9, Paul stated that view was wrong, since “they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel” (Rom. 9:6). **Membership in the covenant community did not guarantee individual salvation.**

The second view recognized that circumcision was only the outward demonstration that man was born sinful and needed cleansing. The cutting away of the foreskin was a graphic demonstration that man needed cleansing at the deepest level. No other part of the human anatomy demonstrates so well that depth of sin, as that is the part of man that produces sinful life.

That is the biblical view. Circumcision was **always** used symbolically to illustrate the desperate need man had for cleansing of the heart.

- Deuteronomy 10:16 Moses commanded the people of Israel, saying “Circumcise then your heart, and stiffen your neck no more.”

- Deuteronomy 30:6 adds, “Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.”
- The Lord commanded the Israelites of Jeremiah’s day to circumcise themselves to the Lord and remove the foreskins of their hearts (Jer. 4:4).

God was always concerned with the heart, not with the physical rite.

For Christians, the physical rite of circumcision is unnecessary because we have already been circumcised with a circumcision made without hands. The object of the circumcision of Christ is the putting off of the body of the flesh. The body of the flesh refers to the sinful, fallen human nature totally dominating believers before salvation. Christians have been cleansed of that sinful dominance and been given a new nature created in righteousness, having been circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, that is, not physical but spiritual.

### **Because Christ is Sufficient, He Offers Complete Forgiveness and Victory**

As Pastor Russ preached last year, the Greek construction is the idea of sphere. Unbelievers exist in the sphere or realm of spiritual death. The Colossians lived in that sphere as did you and I. But, the story does not end there, because God made us alive together with him. Again we see the unity with Christ.

As a result of being made alive with Christ, believers have been forgiven of all their transgressions. This should take us right back to verse 7. The knowledge that all our sins have been forgiven bring us great thanksgiving.

The illustration for this forgiveness is the canceling of the debt record. The record of debt refers to a certificate of indebtedness handwritten by the debtor to acknowledge his debt. **This certificate is similar to you signing a contract promising to obey God perfectly or you lose everything.** God, however, set it aside. It is like erasing a whiteboard.

### **Three Examples of Empty Religious Ritual (2:16-23)**

Legalism, described in verse 16-17, is the religion of human achievement. Legalists base **spirituality** on Christ plus human works. Legalism makes conformity to manmade rules the measure of spirituality. Believers, however, are complete in Christ, who has provided complete salvation and forgiveness. Therefore let no one pass judgment on you based on their legalistic law.

Legalism is dangerously deceptive, because inwardly rebellious and disobedient Christians, or even non-Christians, can conform to a set of external performance standards or rituals. Oprah, Dr. Phil, AA, even the books filling shelves at the “Christian Bookstore” can all get one to change their behavior – but they cannot change the heart.

The false teachers’ prohibitions about food and drink, festivals and the Sabbath were probably based on the Old Testament dietary and celebratory laws that were given to mark Israel as God’s distinct people and to discourage them from intermingling with the surrounding nations. Because the Colossians and the Chapelians are under the New Covenant, the dietary laws of the Old Covenant are no longer in force.

The dietary laws, festivals, sacrifices, and Sabbath day worship were all things which are a mere **shadow** of what was to come; but the **substance** belongs to Christ. A shadow has no reality; the reality is what makes the shadow. Jesus Christ is the reality to which the shadows pointed and were thus, fulfilled.

Mysticism (vv 18-19) is the pursuit of a deeper or higher **subjective** religious experience. It is the belief that spiritual reality is achieved apart from the human intellect. It looks for truth internally, weighing feelings, intuition, and other internal sensations more heavily than objective Biblical data. Mysticism ultimately draws its authority from a self-authenticated light rising from within.

There is a tendency in our human nature to move from objectivity to subjectivity—to shift the focus from Christ to experience. This has always intimidated weak believers and threatened the church.

Christ is all sufficient, “seeing that his divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence” (2 Pet. 1:3).

An ascetic (vv 20-23) is one who lives a life of rigorous self-denial.

The church has been challenged for centuries by those who advocated poverty or mutilation as a means to spirituality.

Asceticism is useless in that it focuses attention on things that all perish. There is no spiritual value in keeping human precepts and teachings.

The reason for asceticism’s worthlessness is seen in 2:23. Asceticism might make a person appear spiritual but it serves only to gratify the flesh. It is a vain attempt to appear more holy than others.

Commenting on the futility of asceticism, the great nineteenth-century Scottish preacher Alexander McClaren wrote, “Any asceticism is a great deal more to men’s taste than abandoning self. They will rather stick hooks in their backs and do the ‘swinging poojah’ than give up their sins and yield up their wills. There is only one thing that will put the collar on the neck of the animal within us and that is the power of the indwelling Christ.”

## **Conclusion**

Paul’s message to the Colossians is also a warning to us. We are not to be influenced by false human philosophy, legalism, mysticism, or asceticism. Those are but “broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13). We must hold fast to Christ, in whom we have been made complete.

The Christ of the Bible must be the center of our message. What else do we have to offer the world?

- If people are looking for something to join, they can join the YMCA.
- If they are looking for a place to go, they can buy a ticket to see the Dragons at 5/3 Field.
- If they want good music, they can listen to the Dayton Philharmonic.
- If they want to listen to a lecture, they can take night class at Sinclair.
- If they want to meet people, they can join a bowling league or do the Turkey Trot.

The answer to the quest for a holy life is not found in the approaches of the world, or even religious systems. It is in recognition of who Christ is and what he has provided. Only when the believer understands and is convinced that Christ has furnished everything he needs (2:9-13) and then trusts him for the transforming power to walk in him (2:6-7), can he make true spiritual progress (2:19).