

## **Colossians: The Incomparable Christ – Exposition of Colossians VIII**

### **Colossians 1:24-25**

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Colossians, as we continue our study in this great letter of the Apostle Paul. We looked at verses 24 through 28 last week. As we move into chapter 2, we'll begin again with verse 24 for the sake of getting the context. Hear the word of the living God.

### **Colossians 1:29–2:5**

*O Father, we thank You for Your word. And we pray that You would use it for our spiritual nourishment and your glory. Each of us comes in our own condition today; some discouraged, needing encouragement, others apathetic, disillusioned, needing correction and strengthening. Work by Your word and by Your Spirit in our hearts. We know that this sword of the spirit pierces even to the joint and to the marrow. It finds those places out in our hearts which even our closest friends cannot penetrate. Open us up before that word and make Your word, O God, an instrument of the grace of salvation. And we'll give You all the praise and all the glory. For we ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.*

The Apostle Paul has spent a chapter arguing that believers are complete in Christ. He will continue that theme in chapter 2. In chapter 2, he will begin to respond to specific challenges to that truth that believers are complete in Christ; that Christ is the all-sufficient Savior. Before we look at that, and before we look at the context in which Paul gives this message, may I ask you a question, though? Are you firm in your commitment to the truth that believers are complete in Christ? Are you firmly convinced that Jesus has paid it all? Are you firmly convinced that forgiveness is found in Him and we need look no place else to find forgiveness? Are you firmly convinced that all the spiritual strength and power which you need for the living of the Christian life can be found in Christ and we don't need to go somewhere else in addition to Christ to find that power? Are you convinced of that? Perhaps someone has come to you suggesting that in addition to these scriptures, there are other scriptures that will help you in your walk with God. They come to you with a lie from the pit of hell when they come to you with that word, because the all-sufficient Christ has said, 'this is My word and it is sufficient for your edification. Look to no place else.' "If they say to look

someplace else other than to the law and to the testimony, the truth is not in them," Isaiah once said. Do you know that these Scriptures are sufficient for your edification, for your strengthening, for guiding you in the way of faith? They are Christ's word to you.

Perhaps some one has come to you and said, "Well it's good that you are a Christian but you need a second definitive experience which I can minister to you." "Perhaps this experience will involve extraordinary revelation. Perhaps it will involve you receiving for the first time the Holy Spirit," they say. Do you realize that that is a challenge to the sufficiency of Christ? Christ dispenses the Spirit from the throne of grace, and all those who are in Christ are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, filled by the Holy Spirit. There is no human being who can minister the Holy Spirit to another person. Christ ministers the Holy Spirit to His people. Christ fills, and goes on filling, His people with the Holy Spirit. To be in Christ is to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It is not Christ plus the Spirit. The Spirit comes with Christ. He is even called the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord, because if you are in Christ, you have all the blessings of the Spirit with Him. It is not Christ plus, it is the all-sufficiency as found in Christ, including the power and strength that we need from the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps someone has come to you and said, "There is some ritual, there's something that you must do. It's not found really in the word of God, but this particular church has declared this to be necessary for you to grow in grace." That is the sound of the evil one whispering in your ear. We are complete in Christ. He has not left out something that we need in order to be presented before Him faultless with exceeding glory, and great joy. He has provided everything that we need. And when the whisperer comes and says you need Christ plus anything, you may be sure that it is the voice of a false prophet. We are complete in Christ. Paul will begin to expand on that.

## **I. Paul's life and purpose.**

I want to look particularly with you at verse 2 today, but before we get to verse 2, I want to make a few passing remarks about the Apostle Paul, who says these words in Colossians chapter 2, verses 1 through 5. Notice verses 28 and 29, where the Apostle Paul shares with you the purpose of his ministry. He says that his goal, his aim, his objective, his purpose is to present every man complete in Christ. He goes on to say that he aims that our hearts might be strengthened. Paul is concerned to present every man complete in Christ. That's the goal of his preaching. Is that what we desire for one another? Is that what we strive for for one another. That was Paul's aim. Is it ours? That was Paul's desire that we be complete in Christ. By implication, Paul is saying, 'If that's my goal, why would I leave something out that you need? Why would I not tell you something that you need to be complete in Christ, if that's my goal?' He's sharing his heart with you. Is that our heart for one another?

Notice also, in addition to Paul's purpose, look at Paul's striving. We see that also in verse 29 of chapter 1 and verse 1 of chapter 2, where the Apostle Paul says, 'I strive for this goal.' Look at his words. "I labor striving according to His power." The Apostle Paul toils, he struggles, for this aim. He knows God is sovereign. He knows that God will reclaim His own. He knows that God will draw men to Christ, but the Apostle Paul still strives to present all God's people complete in Christ. Why? Because the Apostle knows that he is an instrument of the living God, and he is a vehicle by which men and women will be drawn to Christ. He longs to be fruitful in that labor and so he strives for it.

We talk a lot about closed doors today; the Lord closed this door, the Lord closed that door. We get the idea, reading this man's epistles, especially Romans chapter 1, that when this man came to a closed door, he tried to kick it down three or four times before he decided that the Lord had closed that door. He strove to see men and women presented to God complete in Christ. Is that our attitude?

A third thing, however, to see is not only Paul's purpose, and Paul's striving, but Paul's strength. Paul was not doing this striving in his own strength. This is not a driven man that you're seeing. This is a man upheld and undergirded by the strength which is found in Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Notice verse 1 of chapter 2, "I strive according to His power, which mightily works within me." Why is it that the Apostle Paul didn't burn out with all the striving? Because the Apostle Paul was not dependent on inner resources that came from his humanity. The Apostle Paul was consciously dependent on God. He was doing what God wanted him to do, and he was doing it knowing that only God could give the success. Paul couldn't guarantee the success to what he did. He was reliant upon God. He was dependent upon God. He rested in God's strength. He strove by grace. He did the work God gave him. What causes us to burn out in our professions? Relying on our own strength and working on things which God has not gifted us to do. When we do what he would have us do, and when we are reliant upon his grace, we mount up on wings as eagles, and we can do great works, hard works, strivings for God, dependent on his grace and strength.

Notice Paul's care. Not only his purpose, his striving, his strength, but look at his care for these Colossians. The Apostle Paul is said by some people to have been a man who was cold, intellectual, arrogant, brash, obnoxious, confrontive. I've never met the Apostle Paul. I couldn't give you a personality breakdown on him. But that's not what the Apostle Paul of his letters sounds like to me.

This Apostle Paul has never even met the people to whom he is writing. And yet he says, 'My friends, my heart is with you. I'm not there in body, but my spirit is with you. I have concern for you. I have not only concern for you Colossians, but I have concern for the people in Laodicea, and all the people in the Lycias Valley, and all the people in the world that I've not presently met but who love Jesus

Christ. This Apostle has a pastor's heart. He has concern for his fellow believers. Do we see these characteristics in ourselves? Do we have Paul's purpose? Are we committed to his kind of striving? Are we reliant upon the strength that he relied on? Do we have a care for one another like he had? We could do worse than to emulate this man. But all that in passing. Let's look at verse 2.

## **II. The Steady Christian has a Strengthened Heart**

I want to concentrate on verse 2 with you, just for a few minutes, because there is a wealth of Christian wisdom in it. You see, Paul knows that the stability of our faith is dependent upon a number of things, and he gives us those things in verse 2. He says that the stability of our faith is dependent on spiritual encouragement, spiritual with a capital "S". The stability of our faith is dependent on mutual love, he says. He also says it's dependent upon deep assurance. And, finally, he says it's dependent on real saving knowledge of Christ. And so he prays for us what he prays for us beginning in verse 2. That we would have those four things: spiritual encouragement, mutual love, deep assurance, and true knowledge of Christ. Let's look at those things together briefly.

Notice in verse 2, at the very beginning, he says that he desires, he strives, that their hearts may be encouraged. According to the Apostle Paul, the steady Christian, the stable Christian, the mature Christian is a Christian who has a strengthened heart. The Apostle Paul longs that the hearts of the Colossians and our hearts would be encouraged, literally, strengthened. He knows that the strengthening of our hearts is essential, in this context, to protect the Colossians against the false teachings, the false doctrines, the false philosophies, the false prophets. He wants them to be strengthened in their faith, so that they are not so easily enticed by that false teaching. But I want you to note that Paul specifically says that he wants us to be strengthened in our hearts. When the scriptures use that beautiful word heart, it often is indicating that which is the inner most core of our being, the very essence of ourselves. And the Apostle Paul is saying, I want you to be strengthened, Christians, from the inside out. I don't want this to be a superficial thing. I want this to be a strength which is implanted in the very core of your being. You are standing firm and being built up in Christ from the very center of who you are to the outside. And he prays for that and he proclaims that and he strives for that and he longs for that. The steady Christian has a strengthened heart. One old saint said, "If you want to be disappointed, look at others, and if you want to be disheartened, look at yourself. But if you want to be encouraged, look to Christ." Paul wants these believers to find encouragement in Christ. And he doesn't just leave them with that amorphous desire, he fills that in. He says this is how encouragement happens.

And we see this in the second thing that he says in verse 2. He says to us there, that our hearts are encouraged having been knit together in love. The Apostle Paul desires the strengthening of believers hearts, but he also desires that we

would be knit together in love, because the steady Christian is involved in loving fellowship, according to the Apostle Paul. You see, these false teachers were coming and telling these people, 'Oh we have this knowledge, and this knowledge is great and it will really complete you and give you deeper wisdom of God. It will give you deeper power for experience of the power of God.' And the Apostle Paul says, "Let me tell you about the kind of knowledge that I preach. The kind of knowledge I preach produces love, mutual love. Love which is not puffed up. Love which is not arrogant. Love which does not look out for its own, but it looks out for the interest of others. Love which is self-giving. Love which builds true fellowship across the normal lines of human relations, even across family bounds, even across the bounds of friendship, even across the bounds of nationality and race and all the other things that divide us." Because in the Christian community we are characterized by mutual love, our priority, our love for one another, transcends those things which make us different. We love one another, and that is the great mark which our Savior said would characterize His people, "Behold how they love one another." And our Lord Jesus said, 'They will know that you have been with me because you love one another.' Love, you see my friends, is not merely a sentiment. Love is sentiment and action joined. Love is the deliberate, ceaseless, longing for and pursuit of the loved one's welfare. And Christian love is the great mark of Christian life. That is a truth of Scripture, that where love is, where real Christian love is, that is a sure mark of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul, who never down played either faith or hope could say, "The greatest of these is love...and though I have faith to move mountains and have not love, I am nothing." The Apostle Paul knows that this mark of love is at the very core of what true knowledge produces in Christian experience.

That love can be measured, my friends. We can measure that love in our attitudes toward one another. We can measure that love in our prayers for one another. Do we pray for one another? That love can be measured in our practical assistance of one another in time of need. It can be measured in our forbearance, may I say, it may be measured especially in our forbearance with one another. When we are the victims of sin, how do we forebear with our brethren? Our love for them can be seen, in how we respond when it is our hearts that are wounded. And our love can be measured in our concern for one another. In all of these ways, we see whether we really have that type of mutual love and true fellowship which is the mark of real Christian experience. O my friends, it is something for us to strive after that we cultivate that type of mutual love that goes beyond the normal bounds of family. The infidels love their families. The infidels love their small circle of friends, but we Christians love one another across all the boundaries that separate us. Especially in this time do we need an expression of that.

### **III. The Steady Christian has attained a Settled Conviction**

Paul also in verse 2 says, that along with this strengthening of heart by loving fellowship, there is a strengthening of heart by settled conviction, by assurance. Notice what he says. He prays not only that our hearts would be encouraged, having been knit together in love, but that we would attain to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding. He wants us, friends, to be assured. He wants us to have a settled conviction about Christ, a settled commitment to faith. The steady Christian has such a steady settled conviction. Assurance, Paul says, leads to healthy and fruitful Christian experience. That's why he can talk about the wealth of assurance. Assurance of where we stand in Christ enables us to turn aside the enticing words of the world, to turn aside the enticing words of false prophets, to bear up against the buffeting of the world. Settled conviction is what enabled the martyrs to die a death in faithfulness to Jesus Christ. When Polycarp, an 86 year old man, stood before the Roman procounsel, and the man said to him, "Polycarp, I will let you live. I will not put you into the fire, if you will but deny Christ." That 86 year old Christian said, "For eighty and six years I have served Him and He has never denied me yet. How can I deny Him?" That is a man with settled conviction. He knows Christ. He knows that Christ knows him and he is not willing to trade Christ for anything else or to add anything to Christ. He is settled in his commitment and conviction about the hope which is in Christ. That's why Thomas Brooks could say, "assurance is glory in the bud." It is the suburbs of heaven. If we live in this life with a settled conviction of the glory which is ours in Christ, we foretaste what awaits for us in heaven. And that strengthens us for the living of these days.

#### **IV. The Steady Christian has True Knowledge of Christ**

And then the Apostle Paul says this at the end of verse 2: A steady Christian also has true knowledge of Christ. Not only that our hearts might be encouraged by being knit together in love, and by attaining this full assurance of understanding, but also resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery. The people that had been speaking to these Colossians, had been peddling to them true knowledge, real knowledge, deep knowledge. The Apostle Paul says, 'I'll give you true knowledge. Christ, the hope of glory, that's the true knowledge that I want you to have. I don't want you to have knowledge filled with esoteric abstract ideas borrowed from human philosophy. I want you to have a saving personal knowledge of and relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, because He is the hope of glory. That is true knowledge, ' the Apostle Paul says. One old Puritan said, "Knowledge in the head is like money in the bank. But knowledge in the heart is like money ready for use." Knowledge in the heart is what Paul desires for us, a saving personal knowledge of Christ. And there are evidences of that saving personal knowledge. We desire Christ when we have that kind of knowledge of Him. We enjoy Christ when we have that kind of knowledge of Him. And we willingly, freely, gratefully, obey Christ when we have that kind of knowledge of Him. These are marks of steady, stable, mature Christian faith. And the Apostle Paul longs for you to be built up in those marks, to have those graces confirmed.

But perhaps there are some who come today and they do not have that knowledge, and they do not have that type of reigning love in their lives. Perhaps they know that selfishness reigns in their experience, that they do not have any inkling of that type of mutual love for brothers and sisters in Christ of which the Apostle Paul speaks. Perhaps they come today and they don't even begin to comprehend, what it is to have true knowledge of Christ. The Apostle Paul is waiting for you. He is saying, 'you can't have this kind of love, you can't have this kind of strengthening, you can't have this kind of assurance, you cannot have this type of knowledge apart from Christ. It's only found in Him. If you would have that knowledge though, come to Christ. Trust in Him, rest in Him.'

If you don't know how to do that, if you don't know how to receive Christ, if you don't know how to trust in Him or rest in Him, you come and see a minister today. You come and see me. You come and see an elder in this church. Don't leave this place until you have come and done business with Christ. And if you will, I promise you that because He is the all-sufficient Christ, you will be strengthened, and you will be able to love with that unearthly supernatural love, which only Christians can have for one another. You will have that assurance. It will come. It may come sooner. It may come later. It may come stronger. It may come weaker, but you will attain that settled conviction of grace and hope that Paul speaks of, and you will have a true knowledge of the Lord and Savior.

And if you're here as a believer today, and you are struggling in these areas, I am praying that this congregation will be built up in these graces in such ways as they will not only be undeniable to the world, but that our active love for one another is transcending anything that we have ever experienced before. Oh how we need that, friends, to stop playing the games of Christian life and to get serious about the God that we love and serve and love for one another. Oh, that the Lord would do a work in our hearts. Begin with me, begin with you. Let's pray.

*O Lord, we are Yours. We long for a fuller expression of the graces which are all hidden in Christ. I pray, O God, for those who have come today perhaps without Him. May they leave from this place in His arms. We give you the praise and the glory. For we ask it in His name, Amen.*

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