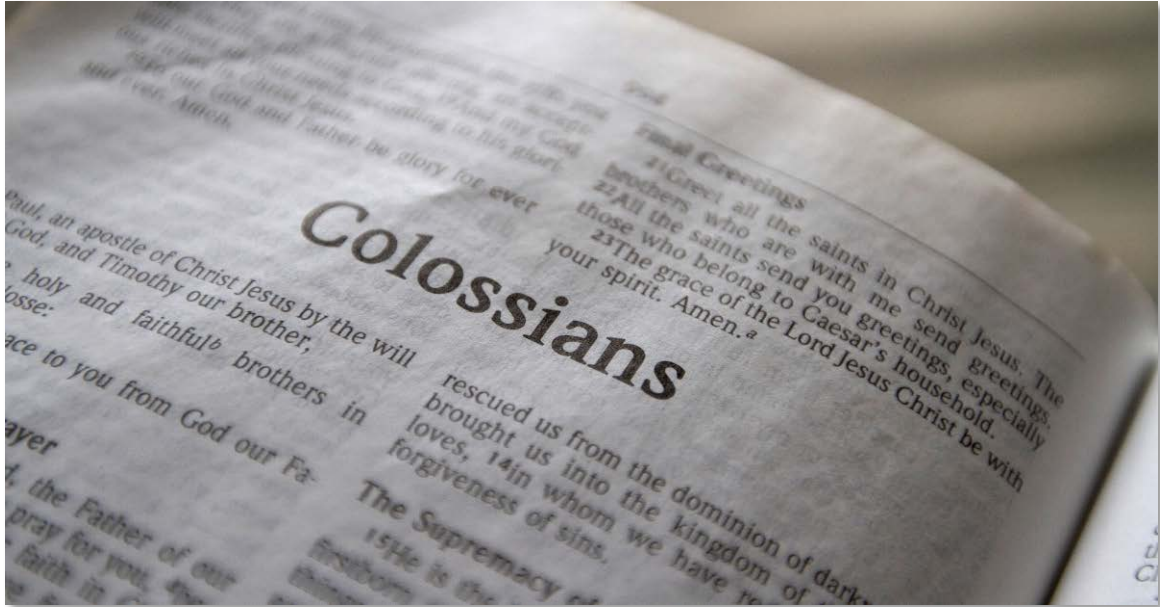


WALKING IN CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 2



A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Walking in Christ: Colossians 2
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Colossians 2: Introduction

Having confirmed the Colossians in their faith, as faithful saints of the Lord Jesus Christ, in chapter 2 he moves on to encourage them not to become distracted by worldly principles and human doctrines in their walk with the Lord.

They should expect a variety of false winds of doctrine to blow their way from time to time. They will also be encouraged to embrace certain practices which are expected if one is a follower of Jesus – even though such practices have no Biblical basis. Jesus is the substance; all these other things are shadows and lies.

Hold fast to Jesus, and walk on.

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We hope you find this study of Ecclesiastes a challenging and stretching experience of journeying more deeply into the Word of God. Thank you for joining us.

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1 The Wealth We Should Seek

Opening Prayer: Psalm 145.1-3

I will extol You, my God, O King;
And I will bless Your name forever and ever.
Every day I will bless You,
And I will praise Your name forever and ever.
Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
And His greatness *is* unsearchable.

Sing Psalm 145.1-3

(Brother James' Air: [*The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want*](#))

I will extol You, God, my King, and ever praise Your Name!
I bless You, Lord, for everything each day, and e'er the same!
Great are You, Lord, my praise I bring; unsearchable Your fame!

Read Colossians 2.1-3

Preparation

1. What are the “riches” Paul wants us to possess?
2. What does he say about Jesus in these verses?

Meditation

In chapter 1 Paul touched on the ideas of our *position* in Christ (saints, complete in Him) and our *condition* in Christ (faithful, increasing in Him). In chapter 2 his focus will be on improving and increasing our condition in the Lord amid all kinds of potential obstacles. But he begins this chapter with an additional and enlarging thought about our position: We are in the One “in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (v. 3). Whatever we need to keep making progress in this life, we will find it in Jesus, Who dwells in us and is our hope of glory.

It's a struggle to improve our condition in the Lord. Paul says he has great “agony” (Greek: ἀγῶνα, *agona*) as he works to encourage the Laodiceans in their walk with the Lord. (It probably won't surprise us to recall that this was the “lukewarm” church Jesus rebuked in Revelation 3.14-22.) This mention of the Laodiceans has a twofold purpose: First, Paul would later instruct that this letter be read to them (4.16); second, he knew that the Colossians were just as human as the Laodiceans, so whatever he did or said with them would apply to the folks in Colossae.

His objective in ministry is clear, that the people of God might be knit together in love and attain “to all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ” (v. 2). This, after all, is eternal life (Jn. 17.3), and it holds out for us, in and by our Lord Jesus Christ, all the wealth of divine wisdom and knowledge we will need to continue improving our condition in the Lord, until at last we see Him face to face.

Everything Paul will say after this is anchored in this foundational truth: We grow in Christ, by Christ in us, growing us in wisdom and knowledge and eternal life.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

This is a positive means to an enduring end: encouraged hearts, knit together in love, attaining to all riches of full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, in whom are

hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2.2, 3).

We give support, confidence, and hope to our fellow believers by encouraging them in the faith. We can inspire courage, spirit and hope by being faithful to our calling in the Lord.

Merriam-Webster defines the transitive verb knit as: to form by interlacing yarn or thread in a series of connected loops with needles; to link firmly or closely; to cause to grow together. And the Bible wants us to do this “in love”.

And by this loving and encouraging knitting together we attain amazing riches.
In God. In Christ. In the Holy Spirit.

We are given full assurance of understanding that opens up knowledge to understand, if only vaguely, the incredible mystery of God’s love and provision for us. We can begin to peel back the layers of the mystery that eludes so many: In Christ we are reconciled to God. In Christ there are treasures of wisdom and knowledge that once seemed unfathomable but are now made clearer. We do not deserve anything good from the hand of God; and yet, in His mercy, Christ died for us.

So that now as we open this treasure trove of grace, we begin to understand that: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (Jms. 1.17).

The enduring wealth we should seek is just waiting for us to accept.
And after accepting the treasure, we go on to encourage, interlace, connect, and link firmly in love other believers to this same end. In Christ.

Reflection

1. What should our role be in helping our church to be more knit together in love?
2. Why is it such a struggle to improve our condition in the Lord? What can we do to grow stronger in that struggle?
3. Why does Paul liken wisdom and knowledge to “treasures”? How can we grow richer in these “treasures”?

Herein is all the worth of grace, by which he saves those who believe, containing in itself deep treasures of wisdom and knowledge and steeping in faith the minds which it draws to the eternal contemplation of unchangeable truth.
Augustine (354-430), *Letters 137.1.3*

Enrich me today, O Lord, so that knowing and loving You I...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 145.4-21

Praise the Lord for all His mighty works, for His compassion and mercy, and for His Kingdom.
Whom will you tell about our mighty and gracious Lord today?

Psalm 145.4-21

(Brother James’ Air: [*The Lord’s My Shepherd, I’ll Not Want*](#))
To ev’ry generation we Your wondrous works shall tell.
The splendor of Your majesty we contemplate full well.
We speak of all Your mighty deeds and all Your greatness tell!

Then shall we all the glorious fame of Your great goodness sing –
Your righteousness, Your gracious Name, Your mercy: praise we bring!
Your steadfast love remains the same, mercy our covering.

Your works shall thank You; all Your saints shall bless and praise You, Lord.
Your reign we bless without restraint; Your power fills our words.
Our children we shall educate in all Your splendor, Lord.

Your Kingdom evermore shall be; You reign forever, Lord!
Your works You do so faithfully, according to Your Word.
The falling You uphold and the oppressed You rescue, Lord!

The eyes of all look up to You to meet our needs each day.
Open Your hand, provide the food we need, O Lord, we pray!
Kindness and righteousness You do, O Lord, in every way!

Be near to all who call on You; all those who fear You, bless.
Preserve all those whose love is true; save us in our distress.
Our mouths will speak with praise of You; Your holy Name we'll bless!

2 En Garde!

Opening Prayer: Psalm 1.1, 2

Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.

Sing Psalm 1.1, 2

(St. Thomas: [*I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord*](#))

How blessed are they that shun sin's vain and wicked ways.
For them has Christ salvation won; He loves them all their days.

God's Word is their delight; they prosper in its truth.
In it they dwell both day and night to flourish and bear fruit.

Read Colossians 2:4-7

Preparation

1. What danger were the Colossians facing?
2. How did Paul encourage them to prepare for this?

Meditation

Verse 4 reads like an alarm: Watch out! En garde! That's precisely what it is, but we won't get to the substance of the warning until verse 8. Until then, a hint of the danger, and a few things to review.

The threat is in "persuasive words" (v. 4). To persuade someone is to bring them over to your view. All kinds of ill winds of doctrine blow against believers every day, and some of them can be very persuasive, causing us to drift off course from our great salvation (cf. Heb. 2.1-3). We need to recognize and be ready to struggle against them.

How do we guard against such threats? Begin with good order, steadfastness of faith (v. 5), growing in the Lord (v. 6), and walking obediently in Christ (vv. 6, 7). These things firmly in place, we'll be able to withstand whatever the world or the enemy of our soul may throw against us. Since we have received Christ and are established in Him, we need to continue daily in those disciplines that allow us to abound in the life of Christ, being careful always to give thanks in all things (v. 7).

Walk the path of Christ and not of sin, and you'll be ready to do battle with whatever comes your way.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

"As we therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith..." (vs. 6, 7)

I received a new book, but I'm not going to read it.
I received a new appliance, but I'm not going to use it.

I received some new walking shoes, but I'm not going to wear them.

We have received Christ, but we're not going to learn from Him?
We have received Christ, but we're not going to grow in Him?
We have received Christ, but we're not going to walk with Him?

What are we thinking?
What were the Colossians thinking and doing?
Or not doing, as the case may be?

We are told in Psalm 1 exactly how to learn from and grow in Him:

1. Don't follow the counsel of the ungodly.
2. Don't hang around with people who don't love God.
3. Don't fellowship with those who are scornful of the Word of God.
4. Do find delight in the law of the LORD.
5. Do read and think about that law day and night.

The key to being rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith is found in the consumption and extensive use of God's Word: "Your words were found, and I did eat them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts" (Jer. 15.16).

When we know these things, blessed and happy are we if we do them (Jn. 13.17).

"Happy are the people who are in such a state; happy are the people whose God is the LORD!" (Ps. 144.15)

Reflection

1. What are some examples of "persuasive words" that might distract us from the Gospel?
2. How would you advise a new believer to be "rooted and built up" in the Lord Jesus?
3. In what ways is the Christian life like a warfare? Like doing battle?

Having completed his definition, he turns now to give a warning. He tells them to beware of those who corrupt Christian doctrine. It is like a doctor who first gives the cure, and then deals with the cause of the disease. Philipp Melancthon (1497-1560), Notes on Paul's Letter to the Colossians 2.4

Help me to walk the path of Jesus today, Lord, so that I...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 1.3-6

Pray that the Lord will help you to see every temptation that threatens to dislodge you from the path of Jesus. Call on Him to sustain and bless your every endeavor this day.

Sing Psalm 1.3-6

(St. Thomas: [*I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord*](#))

Firm planted on the banks of God's great stream of grace,
they raise unending praise and thanks to His great glorious face.

The wicked are not so, but, driven by the winds,
they fall and perish, weighed with woe, when once God's wrath begins.

In Jesus' righteousness, though sinners fail and fall,
His flock He will preserve and bless, who on His favor call.

3 Whose Captive?

Opening Prayer: Psalm 81.1-3, 8

Sing aloud to God our strength;
Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob.
Raise a song and strike the timbrel,
The pleasant harp with the lute.
Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon,
At the full moon, on our solemn feast day.

“Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you!
O Israel, if you will listen to Me!”

Sing Psalm 81.1-3, 8

(St. Petersburg: [*With Grateful Heart My Thanks I Bring*](#))

O sing for joy to Jesus our strength; to Jacob’s great God shout joyfully at length!
And strike the drum, and offer a song; all instruments, your glad music prolong.
“O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!”

Read Colossians 2.8-10

Preparation

1. What does Paul warn us against here?
2. Why must we be *en garde* against this?

Meditation

According to Paul, Jesus has broken our captivity to the world, the flesh, and the devil, and He has taken us captive unto Himself in the Presence of God (Eph. 4.8-10).

That being so, we need to be careful that we don’t become captive again to powers contrary to the Kingdom of God.

Whatever distracts us from Christ, whatever separates us from Him, engages our attention or devotion more than Christ, whatever occupies our minds, enthalls our hearts, or guides our consciences more than Jesus – whatever this may be, it takes us captive, as surely as Israel was captive in Babylon. Especially, it appears, we are vulnerable to human and worldly ways of thinking and being – philosophies, deceptions, traditions, spiritual curiosities, and the like (v. 8).

We must be continually on guard against such things, and the way to do this is to be always focused on and close to Jesus. He is all the fullness we could ever desire, and we are complete in Him (vv. 9, 10). Stay close to Christ, and by His invincible power He will keep you from becoming captive to the world.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

We have a choice to make:
Do we want to serve the King?
Or the court jester?

Here it is spelled out for us, plain as day: We can be complete in Christ, in Whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; or we can be incomplete and indwelt by vain philosophy, empty deceit, traditions of men, and the basic principles of the world.

Hmmm.

Joshua put this same choice to the people of Israel: “And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served...or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24.15)

Paul wrote to Titus: “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared” ...it was a game-changer (Titus 3.3, 4).

When we know that we have decided to leave the court jester behind and follow the King, we are given some suggestions as to how to accomplish this goal.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians: “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5.15, 16).

And to Timothy: “...you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3.15-17).

Let’s choose to serve and be captive to the King; and to beware of anything that might keep us from that goal; and to immerse ourselves in the King’s Word to guide us in this endeavor.

Reflection

1. How can you tell if you’re beginning to be captive to anything other than Jesus?
2. Why are we “vulnerable to human and worldly ways of thinking and being?”
3. How does being immersed in the Scriptures help to keep us *en garde* against deceiving philosophies?

Would you then be reckoned as belonging to Christ's flock? Would you remain in his folds? Do not deviate a nail's breadth from purity of doctrine. For unquestionably Christ will act the part of the good Shepherd by protecting us if we but hear his voice, and reject those of strangers. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Colossians 2.8*

Keep me in Your righteous path today, O Lord. Let no subtle wind of false teaching cause me to...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 81.8-16

Pray that God will keep you focused on Him and walking in His truth throughout this day.

Sing Psalm 81.9-16, 8

(St. Petersburg: [*With Grateful Heart My Thanks I Bring*](#))

“Let no false gods among you be found; but scatter their altars over the ground.

Pursue not wealth, nor leisure nor fame, but worship the Savior's glorious Name:
O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

For You are God, Your Name is the Lord, Who faithfully keeps His covenant Word,
Who rescued us from bondage and pride; our mouths He would fill, we open them wide.
"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

"My people would not listen to Me, but hardened their hearts most hideously;
I cursed them for their hard-hearted ways to wander in darkness all of their days:
O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

Now let us all abandon our ways and listen to God, and offer Him praise!
Our foes He will so quickly subdue, extending His hand to save and renew.
"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

Then even those despising the Lord would falsely obey and follow His Word.
In vain they seem to follow His way, yet judgment awaits on God's chosen day.
"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

The finest foods for us He will buy, and furnish us an abundant supply;
How sweet our lives can be in the Lord, when only we heed His glorious Word.
"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

4 From Death to Life

Opening Prayer: Psalm 31.23, 24

Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints!
For the LORD preserves the faithful,
And fully repays the proud person.
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart,
All you who hope in the LORD.

Sing Psalm 31.23, 24

(Brother James' Air: [*The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll not Want*](#))

O love the Lord, all you, His saints! He keeps us faithfully.
But all who act in sinful pride His wrath shall surely see.
Be strong and let your heart not fret; wait on Him constantly!

Read Colossians 2.11-15

Preparation

1. How were we “dead” before coming to faith in Jesus?
2. How did Jesus deal with that “dead” condition?

Meditation

The “circumcision” to which Paul refers here is the work of the Holy Spirit in opening our soul to faith in Jesus (cf. Deut. 30.1-10; Ezek. 36.26, 27; Gal. 4.6, 7). The Spirit applies the work of Jesus to forgive our sins, cleanse us of all guilt, and begin the work of clothing us with Jesus Himself (2 Cor. 3.12-18). We submit to baptism as the outward sign of an inward reality, that Jesus has cleansed and forgiven and made us new creations in Him (2 Cor. 5.17).

All this dramatically emphasizes our having been set apart for the Lord as saints. Jesus has taken our old lives upon Himself, and condemned them in His death on the cross (v. 13). He has given His new resurrection life to us and conveyed us into His Kingdom, so that, as we increase in faithfulness, we might no longer be captive to the things of this world.

And just for good measure, Jesus has “disarmed principalities and powers” so that they have no authority over us. The only way they ever disrupt our walk with the Lord is when we give ourselves to them by falling through temptation into sin. And this, we don't *have* to do, but *choose* to do, when we hanker after the things of this world and blatantly deny our new life in Christ.

We don't have to go there. Once we were dead in trespasses and sins; now we are live in Jesus. Live it up!

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Being dead” denotes a rather dour situation; whereas, “alive together with Him” has a happier and more active connotation!

Being dead we are alone.
Alive we are together with Him.

But this condition of life was hard-earned by Jesus for us.
He took everything that makes us dead and nailed it to the cross.
And there it hung with Him.
We must leave it all there with Him.

And we must strive to stop intentionally putting more things up there – a virtual piñata of transgressions that we keep expecting God to swat away.

No, we are not perfect; but yes, we are together with Christ and have the potential to be pleasing to God rather than chronically sinful. We are dusty humans, no doubt, but being filled with the Holy Spirit should make us less so. Jesus tells us to “Strive to enter through the narrow gate...” (Lk. 13.24). “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt. 7.13,14).

Jesus saved Paul and us, and then sends us out to “open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26.18).

Instead of running down the wide path alone, let’s live it up on the narrow path together with Him!

Reflection

1. What does it mean for someone to be “dead” in their trespasses and sins?
2. How does the Holy Spirit overcome that dead condition? How do you experience His work in you?
3. How can believers help one another be more consistent in walking the path of life?

This is the whole scheme of our salvation, by which the one who as God had made man himself became man, for the sake of finding lost man. This is the whole matter of Christ shedding for the forgiveness of our sins true, not false, blood, and with his blood, “obliterating the bond of our sins.” Augustine (354-430), Sermons 237.1

Thank You, Lord, for my salvation. Let me know Your Presence with me today as I...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 31.14-22

Thank the Lord for His great salvation. Entrust yourself to Him for the day ahead. Call on Him to make you bold as His witness and to encourage others in His goodness.

Psalm 31.14-22

(Brother James’ Air: [*The Lord’s My Shepherd, I’ll not Want*](#))

But I will trust in You, O Lord; You are my God and King!
My times are in Your hand; from those who hate me rescue me!
Shine down Your face on me with grace; let Your love on me be!

Let me not come to shame, O Lord, for on Your Name I call.
Let wicked men to hell be cast, let shame upon them fall.
Their lies and plots shall come to naught; to silence send them all!

How great the goodness You reserve for those who fear You, Lord,
who rest in You and boldly stand before men in Your Word.
You cover them from plots of men; You shelter them, O Lord!

Blessed be the Lord, for He has shown His steadfast love to me!
In my alarm I cried to Him; He heard my fervent plea!
In fear and dread with You I pled; You heard and rescued me!

5 Cheating Judges

Opening Prayer: Psalm 71.14-16

But I will hope continually,
And will praise You yet more and more.
My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness
And Your salvation all the day,
For I do not know *their* limits.
I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD;
I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only.

Sing Psalm 71.14-16, 3

(Solid Rock: [*My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*](#))

But as for me my voice I raise to sing in hope and constant praise!
With saving grace my voice will swell Your never-ending grace to tell.

Refrain, v. 3

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;
my Rock and Fortress ever be!

Read Colossians 2.16-19

Preparation

1. What things are “a shadow of things to come”?
2. To what should faithful saints “hold fast”?

Meditation

It appears that the Colossian Christians were being pressured to conform to certain outward behaviors relating to foods and feast days, or to the adoration of angels (vv. 16, 18). This pressure may have been coming from Judaizers, who claimed to believe in Jesus but insisted on continuing to practice Old Testament laws relating to the work of the priests and the altar, or “super-apostles” (2 Cor. 11.4-6 ESV) who boasted of spiritual insights beyond what the Scriptures allow.

These false teachers seemed to show up in many places when Paul was not present, and they were judging people as not saved who did not go along with their teaching (v. 16). Those who did go along with them were being cheated of the *substance* of faith by clinging to the *shadows* of it (v. 17). That is, the Judaizers were pressuring them to keep up certain old practices which, with the coming of Jesus as the final sacrifice and High Priest (Heb. 7-9), were no longer valid. “You’re not really a Christian,” these Judaizers insisted, “unless you keep up these dietary laws, feast days, and so forth.” And certain of them may have been insisting that the *truly spiritual* Christian could see into the unseen realm and thus was able to commune with and worship angels.

These false teachers had let go of Jesus for their pet teachings. The Colossians must not allow the Judaizers to judge or cheat them by drawing their focus and devotion away from Christ. He alone is their Unity and Strength (v. 19).

These days, false teachers are more subtle. They say things like, “You’re not really a Christian unless you believe this doctrine” or “Real Christians have all had this experience” or “Your faith is true if you view the Lord’s return like this.” Don’t let them judge or cheat you. Hold fast to Jesus.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

So let no one judge you about trivial matters pertaining to the faith, the “this-and-that” of the traditions of men, because they are just a shadow of things to come (v. 16). They are areas of darkness caused by light being blocked by them. And we don’t want that to happen in our minds, hearts, or lives!

We want the full light of Jesus to shine on us and we don’t want anything to block that light. But if we are warned about this, it must be something that can easily happen. Perhaps we start to care more about pleasing the pastor and the folks at church, than about pleasing Jesus.

Or we begin to focus on extra-curricular theological ideas that are not the substance of our salvation. Maybe we even begin to care more about how all this is making us feel rather than living completely for God.

We must work diligently on growing in the Lord in the substance of His Word. We must strive for faith because without that it is impossible to please God. For if we come to God, we must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Heb. 11.1, 6)

Robert Louis Stevenson puts this shadow in right perspective:

*I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.*

As cute as the poem is, it conveys great meaning to me.

Let’s not let these shadows that go everywhere with us – traditions, doubts, food, drink, festivals, sabbaths, angel worship, egos, not holding fast to Jesus – block the light of Jesus because their usefulness, these shadows, is more than I can see.

Reflection

1. What’s the difference between the “shadow” of truth and the “substance” of truth?
2. Why is it so easy for us to be distracted from the substance to the shadow of truth? How can we guard against this?
3. How would you counsel a new believer to grow in the Lord and the substance of His Word?

Do you see how he depreciates what the Colossians think important? If you have obtained such things [i.e., grace and wisdom through Christ], Paul asks, why make yourself accountable for these petty matters? And he makes light of them.... Don't put up with those who judge you in these trivial considerations. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on Colossians 7

Let me not become entangled in outward forms of false faith, Lord, but help me always instead to...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 71.17-24

Consider the day ahead, and any temptations you might face. Call on the Lord for His Presence and strength to enable you to hold fast to Him in all things.

Sing Psalm 71.17-24, 3

(Solid Rock: [*My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*](#))

O Lord, I praise Your righteousness Who me from youth have taught and blessed.
Forsake me not when I am old, 'til I Your mercies all have told!

Refrain, v. 3

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;
my Rock and Fortress ever be!

Your righteous deeds are great and true. O God, there is no one like You!
Though many troubles I have seen, You will revive my soul again!

Refrain

Increase my greatness, comfort me, and unto You shall praises be.
Your truth I will exalt full well, O Holy One of Israel!

Refrain

My lips with joy and praises ring; to You, Redeemer, praise I bring!
I praise Your goodness all day long; Lord, humble all who do me wrong.

Refrain

6 A Religion of Appearances

Opening Prayer: Psalm 126.1, 2

When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion,
We were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing,
Then they said among the nations,
“The LORD has done great things for them.”

Sing Psalm 126.1, 2

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

When God restored our fortunes all, we were like those who sweetly dream.
Our mouths with joy and laughter filled, made Him our constant song and theme.

Read Colossians 2.20-23

Preparation

1. From what did the death of Christ deliver us?
2. What’s wrong with a religion that consists primarily of outward appearances?

Meditation

Two dangers confronted the Colossians. First, false teachers were adding to faith in Jesus by requiring practices that looked good but had no Biblical basis. These practices related to certain dietary regulations and feast days, as well as circumcision. Paul previously described these as the shadow rather than the substance of Christ. Here he goes further, saying they are “principles of the world” (v. 20).

What he means is that, in the world, religion was a matter of externals *merely*. That’s why the Greeks, for example, had so many idols and roadside altars and religious protocols. Being religious meant being seen to be religious (cf. Acts 17.16-23). This was the second danger. The Colossians might become so fastidious about the outward appearance of faith – so that people would accept them as part of the “true group” – that they would lose the inner substance of life in Christ. They might look wise and religious, but they would be empty of power to resist fleshly indulgences (v. 23)

Those who have died with Christ to the outward appearances of this world (v. 20) will show through the life of Christ in them the true substance of faith in obedience to the Word of God only, not the “commandments and doctrines of men” (v. 21). They will be seen to be faithful saints and loving followers of Jesus, not just people who dotted all the “i’s” and crossed all the “t’s” of religion.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

If we are saved... (John 3.16)

If we belong to Christ... (Is. 43.1)

If we have tasted of His goodness... (Ps. 34.8)

If we have joy everlasting... (John 15.11; 17.13)

If we died with Christ to the world... (Col. 2. 20)

Why would we ever feel lost?

Why would we try so hard to fit in with other's demands on us?
Why would we seek nourishment from the world and its appearances?
Why would we be unhappy?
Why would we seek the living among the dead? (Lk. 24.5, 6)

“Since you died, as it were, with Christ and this has set you free from following the principles of the world concerning how to be saved – by doing good and obeying various rules – why do you keep right on following them anyway, still bound by such rules as not eating, tasting, or even touching certain foods?

Such rules are mere human teachings, for food was made to be eaten and used up. These rules may seem good, for rules of this kind require strong devotion and are humiliating and hard on the body, but they have no effect when it comes to conquering a person's evil thoughts and desires.

They only make one proud” (Col. 2.20-23 TLB).

“But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15.57).

Reflection

1. How does following human appearances and the principles of the world rob us of the reality of our salvation?
2. How can we tell whether we're living with a view to Christ and His glory rather than for appearances?
3. What are the best ways to keep from falling into the trap of human appearances?

He sets aside, by a twofold argument, the enactments of which he has made mention — because they make religion consist in things outward and frail, which have no connection with the spiritual kingdom of God; and secondly, because they are from men, not from God. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Colossians 2.22

Lord, let my faith be only in Jesus, and only according to Your Word, so that I...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 126.3-6

Pray that God will revive and keep you in the true faith, and that He will use you to sow that faith in the souls of others today.

Sing Psalm 126.2-6

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

Then the astonished nations said, “The Lord has done great things for them!”
Indeed, great things our God has done, Whose Name we praise, Amen, Amen!

Restore our fortunes, Lord our King! Let grace like flowing streams prevail.
All they with tears of joy shall sing who sow while yet they weep and wail.

They who in tears of sorrow sow and cast their seed on every hand,

with joy shall reach their heav'nly home, and bring the harvest of their land.

7 Hold Fast to Jesus

Opening Prayer: Psalm 116.1-6

I love the LORD, because He has heard
My voice *and* my supplications.
Because He has inclined His ear to me,
Therefore I will call *upon Him* as long as I live.
The pains of death surrounded me,
And the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me;
I found trouble and sorrow.
Then I called upon the name of the LORD:
“O LORD, I implore You, deliver my soul!”
Gracious *is* the LORD, and righteous;
Yes, our God *is* merciful.
The LORD preserves the simple;
I was brought low, and He saved me.

Sing Psalm 116.1-6

(Mit Freuden Zart: [*All Praise To God Who Reigns Above*](#))

I love the Lord because He hears my cries and pleas for mercy.
Because He bends to me His ears, my prayers shall ever thus be.
The snares of death encompassed me; hell’s grip could not unloosened be;
distress and anguish pressed me.

I called to God, “O Lord, I pray, my soul redeem with favor!”
The Lord is gracious in His way, and righteous is our Savior.
His mercy to the simple flies; He lifted me up to the skies –
I rest in Him forever!

Read Colossians 2; meditate on verses 16-19

Preparation

1. In this chapter, how does Paul describe Jesus?
2. What does he say about those who would draw us away from Jesus into the “shadows” and “appearances” of faith?

Meditation

In Colossians 1, Paul celebrated the fact that the faithful saints in Colossae were truly in Christ. They proved the genuineness of their faith in love for one another, thus demonstrating that they had truly been conveyed into the Kingdom of God’s Son and were on the path toward perfect holiness and blamelessness before Him. Paul saw it as his duty to reinforce their faith, encourage them in following Jesus, and to contribute what he could to help them become daily more complete in Jesus.

In chapter 2, Paul extends his description of the greatness of Jesus, that He is the true substance of faith, the Treasury of all wisdom and knowledge, and the fullness of the Godhead bodily. In Jesus, we who believe are complete – complete, but not finished. We must labor to walk in the Lord and before Him in all things, at all times being on guard against those who would distract us from faith in Jesus to trusting in human practices, doctrines, or disciplines. These things may serve to show us a

shadow of Christ, but we do not trust in shadows, especially since we have been buried and raised with Christ to new life in Him, “who is the head and principality of all power” (v. 10).

We will always be tempted to look for shortcuts, to get in step with popular movements, or to listen to the impassioned words of those who want us to swap God’s ways for theirs. Doing so may help us to strap on some appearances of faith, but they will draw us away from the substance, which is Christ. Let your faith be always lodged in Him, and hold fast to Him and His Word, rather than the shadows of faith men may devise.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Let no one cheat you of your reward” ...that... “grows with the increase that is from God” (vv.18,19).

“For *the kingdom of heaven is* like a man traveling to a far country who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them” (Matt.25.14).

Imagine for a moment that someone gave you a huge inheritance, but because you made a bad decision with it due to the poor guidance of your financial planner, you lost it all.

Or you were given a big bundle of loose jewels that you placed in a container from an acquaintance, but neglected to check if it was secure. The container had a hole in it, and you lost them all.

Perhaps you had an amazing talent, but someone discouraged you from using it, and it was lost to you.

Sadly, for a variety of reasons, you have been cheated of your reward.
But with our faith, we are never to let this happen. Paul tells us this emphatically!
We have been given the gift of Jesus Christ, and with Him, entrance into the Kingdom of God.

God has delivered His goods to us.
We are to cherish, care for, and use them for His glory.
We are to keep a close watch on this treasure.
“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life” (Prov.4.23).
And “...lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal”, nor can anyone cheat you of this reward. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6.20, 21).

This treasure, this inheritance, this reward is from God.
Let’s not ever let anything or anyone, shoddy or shadowy, cheat us of it.
“For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things,
To whom be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11.36).

Hold fast to Jesus!

Reflection

1. Why are we so prone to let go of Christ and prefer appearances and human doctrines instead?
2. What can we do, when we are tempted like this, to make sure we hold fast to Jesus?
3. How can you prepare yourself day by day to prevent anyone from cheating your of your

inheritance in Christ?

Here we have the anticipation of an objection, in which, while he concedes to his adversaries what they allege, he at the same time reckons it wholly worthless. For it is as though he had said, that he does not regard their having a show of wisdom. But show is placed in contrast with reality, for it is an appearance, as they commonly speak, which deceives by resemblance. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Colossians 2.23

Father, keep me connected to Jesus today, so that I...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 116.7-19

Pray through all the ways God has blessed you in Jesus Christ. Thank Him that you are complete in Him, and ask Him to help you improve your walk with the Lord in specific ways this day.

Sing Psalm 116.7-19

(Mit Freuden Zart: [*All Praise to God Who Reigns Above*](#))

Full well the Lord has dealt with me; my soul from death He delivered.
My weeping eyes, my stumbling feet, He has redeemed forever.
Forever I before His face shall walk with those who know His grace,
and dwell with them forever.

Afflicted, I believe His Word, though lying men would undo me.
What shall I render to the Lord for all His blessings to me?
Salvation's cup I lift above and call upon the God of love
and pay my vows most truly.

How sweet to Him when saints depart – save me, Your servant, Savior!
From sin You loosed my wand'ring heart; I praise Your Name forever!
On You I call, my vows to pay; here in Your presence I would stay
Your praise to offer ever.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. How does Paul refer to Jesus in Colossians 2? How should holding fast to *this* Jesus help you to improve in your walk with and work for Him.
2. What are some examples of the kinds of “principles of the world” that seek to draw you away from faith in Jesus? How should you resist these?
3. God intends us to grow together as the Body of Christ (v. 19). What do healthy, growing churches look like (cf. Eph. 4.11-16)?
4. What are some differences between the “appearance of wisdom” (v. 23) and true wisdom, of which Christ is the Treasury?
5. What’s the most important lesson you have learned from Colossians 2? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

For Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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