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## The Good Fight Colossians 2:1-5

**Intro:** As we noted in our last study, 1:24 begins the body of Paul's letter to the Colossian congregation. As we turn now to today's text, we can say that it's possible that ch2 is introducing a new focus in Paul's argument against the false teaching that seems to be plaguing the Colossian Christians but we should also note that the passage (1-5) is closely related to the theme of 1:24-29. While the 2 sections are similar, today's text is not merely a rehashing of last week's text. Paul continues to talk about his ministry in this new paragraph but his attention begins to shift a bit from a general discussion of himself and his ministry to focus more on the significance of his ministry for the Colossians and the threat of false teaching they are facing.

We should also note that nowhere in his letter does Paul accuse or even imply that the Colossians have abandoned their faith or have accepted false teaching wholeheartedly. On the contrary, Paul always affirms the solid spiritual state of these believers. In fact, later on in this chapter, the terminology he uses suggests that the false teaching was something to be resisted, not something that had already infected the church. The Colossian Christians had started well and they are continuing well. Paul's true concern is for their future. This letter is a vaccination against heresy, not an antibiotic for those already afflicted.

**1-** Paul now addresses the Colossians specifically. The For simply connects our text with with 1:29 as Paul begins to illustrate and elaborate on his apostolic struggle (conflict). The I want you to know is meant to draw attention to what he's about to say. Clearly, his apostolic ministry and all the suffering and struggle that accompanies it is not just on behalf of the churches he has founded personally, but also for those like Colosse and Laodicea, that he has never visited before with whole congregations of people he has never met. Just like in 1:29, Paul characterizes his ministry as involving hard work, often in difficult circumstance and against dedicated and formidable opponents.

But, the great conflict he speaks of does not imply that he is constantly

engaged in a battle of wits or biblical doctrine with these opponents. No, this great conflict was inside Paul. He expends as much energy in prayer, in caring and in writing letters for their spiritual benefit as he does for his own converts. He is describing his spiritual warfare and heartfelt care for them as a great conflict; using the same sports metaphor as the striving of [1:29](#).

Now, some may say that with all the suffering and persecution Paul has endured for the gospel up to this point in his life, how can he truly consider his personal prayer and heartfelt care to be a great conflict? Certainly, Paul didn't enjoy any of the trials and struggles that he experienced during and because of his ministry to the Gentiles but he was able to endure them because he had been forewarned of them by the Lord at his conversion ([Acts 9:16](#)). Paul had been given insight (foresight) as to what his experience in ministry would be like and yet he still accepted the commission and he still chose to go. Maybe it was the fact that he persecuted Christians before his conversion or the vision of the risen Savior or that for the first time in his life his entire OT education finally made perfect sense. It could have been any of these things or it could have been a combination of all of them; but for whatever reason, Paul knew the danger associated with his particular God-given ministry but he did it anyway and He did it gladly and faithfully.

The physical wear and tear on his body came with the territory but the internal struggle, this great conflict was a constant strain on him emotionally and spiritually and it compelled him to act on behalf of the Body of Christ, even in the limited circumstance he found himself in at the time. I'm sure Paul would have rather gone to Colosse to speak to the congregation in person; preaching, teaching and mentoring them – even contending with the false teachers face-to-face, but that was not possible. So, he had to be satisfied with praying for them, writing to them and trusting in the Lord to bridge the gap and bless His people.

You still might not see how all this could honestly be considered a great conflict but, what's the most difficult thing Jesus ever instructed His disciples to do? Each one of the 12 Apostles suffered greatly for the gospel and they all gave their lives for it in one horrible way or another, with the exception of John. You can still say that he gave his life for the gospel because he never recanted or denied the gospel message, not even after being boiled in hot oil! But suffering and untimely deaths were not the most difficult charge

Jesus gave to His disciples. That charge is found in [Mt 16:24](#). Following Jesus is difficult but you can't truly do this until you, like Him, take up your own cross, and you will never take up your own cross until you do the extremely difficult task of denying yourself. In this we can see that Paul's great conflict was no different than ours is today. He had to deny what he wanted to do and settle for what the Lord had enabled him to do and he had to sit in that prison and pray that his striving was received and implemented.

There are actually 3 groups of beneficiaries of this apostolic conflict engaged in by Paul: you (Colossians), those in Laodicea and as many as have not seen my face in the flesh (or face-to-face). Laodicea was an important city, with a significant Jewish population, about 12 miles from Colosse. The church there was probably founded by Epaphras as well. Of course, both congregations fall into the last category so it's clear that Paul felt a ministerial responsibility for all believers, even those he had never met. That's the heart of a true apostle; he was willing to leave it all out on the field, not for personal glory but for the benefit of the Body of Christ and for the glory of God!

Now, if Paul's ministerial responsibility extended to all believers then we can also be sure his apostolic authority applies to all believers as well. I doubt that Paul would have foreseen or even considered that the church would last another 2000+ years, nor would he ever have conceived that his great conflict would've continued to benefit Gentile believers well into the distant future and yet, here we are, Gentiles every one – still being instructed, encouraged, challenged and exhorted by Paul's writings. They've continued to be a source of spiritual instruction and comfort to the church all these many years and will continue to be such for years to come, until the Lord returns to receive us!

**2-** Paul shares the specific concerns or intended goals of his spiritual conflict; there are 3. 1) that their hearts may be encouraged. First, let's recognize that all biblical references to the heart requires English speakers like us to distance ourselves from our own culture. In modern English, there's a strong tendency to use the word heart to refer to the emotions: a broken heart doesn't equate to a heart attack. When we say someone is brokenhearted, we mean they are sad, discouraged or otherwise emotionally compromised.

That's concept of heart is foreign to the Bible. In Scripture, heart designates the center of the personality, the source of willing and thinking in addition to feeling. Thus, it's a new heart that God promises to give His people ([Ezek 36:26](#)) in order to transform their basic orientation back towards Himself. Paul saying that their hearts may be encouraged is simply a way of referring to an encouragement that touches the deepest part of our being and affects every aspect of our person. Paul was concerned about their overall enthusiasm. He knew that discouraged, downcast Christians are easy prey for beguiling false teachers with tales of spiritual mysteries and religious perfection.

The Greek word Paul uses for encouraged possesses a wide spectrum of meaning. In some cases it's translated as exhort or urge, other times it means to be strengthened; but here it has the sense of comfort or encourage. Certainly, the knowledge that Paul cares greatly for them could itself be a great boost to their self-esteem and perceived worth. Along with that comes the realization that they are connected to all the other churches throughout the Empire, and particularly those of Paul's ministry. Most importantly, they will find encouragement in an understanding of how much God cares for them and values them, as well as how much He has to offer them. However this encouragement may come to them, behind the Greek word used here is always the idea of enabling a person to to meet some difficult situation with confidence and gallantry. Paul wanted these Colossian believers to be fit for heroic action.

2) being knit together in love. On the surface of it, it seems as though Paul is concern about their unity, which is always important in any congregation but the term translated as knit together can also mean instructed or taught, which would render the phrase as being taught in love. While this phrase may better fit the context of understanding and knowledge in the rest of the verse, it doesn't necessarily exclude the idea of unity. In truth, Christian unity only comes about as we are instructed in the spiritual realities that unite us in Christ. But, as Paul explains it, this unity from instruction would not come from coercion, but would be conducted and accomplished in love.

3) attaining to...understanding. Paul wasn't just concerned about their encouragement and unity but he's concerned about their spiritual understanding as well. He knew that their encouragement and unity wasn't just a matter of love but also of growing together in God's truth. Christian

unity doesn't only come from love, it comes from truth, God's truth; more specifically, from growing in the understanding and knowledge of God's truth. It is as they give up the temptation to wander to wander away from the truth of the gospel that the Colossians will be certain of the hope God offers them in Christ.

The full assurance here refers to the assurance, the full wealth of conviction that a growing understanding of God's truth can bring. Paul equates this full assurance to actual riches; yet, only those who possess this understanding know it's true value. Real riches are found in the believer's full assurance. Many Christians lack full assurance about the character of God and are unconvinced that He is really good and loving. Others lack full assurance of their salvation and wonder if their Christian life is for real. Both tragedies stem from a real lack of understanding of God's revealed truth, which is an indictment against the quality of biblical instruction most Christians are subjected to.

Too often, in too many churches, only selected portions of God's Word are read and then, sadly, it is reshaped to fit into a preconceived notion of truth rather than allowing God's truth to challenge or judge the hearers (and speakers). One astute preacher once cleverly titled his sermon, "This Is the Lord That the Day Hath Made." While we need to bring the world into the church, we must constantly guard against bringing the pagan mindset of the world into the church. God's Word, rightly divided, faithfully taught and properly applied provides our only weapon against the intrusion of culturally based values. Rightly received, God's truth fends off the danger that we will mistake our false, selfish hopes for divine truth and foolishly recast the true Lord into a false one.

Paul goes on to define just what this complete understanding entails and it's nothing more or less than knowing the mystery of God, which is Christ. The ultimate purpose of Paul's ministry, including this very letter, is that believers might know Christ – mystery of God. The term mystery of God is used in a few different ways in the NT. Here, Paul uses it in regards to the character and person of God – something we couldn't know unless it was revealed to us by Him. That revelation has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ. The knowledge the Colossians are to have won't be a spurious, elitist or secret religious knowledge but the real mystery of God, which is Christ Himself.

**3-** Again, Paul is piling up words in order to hammer home the truth that Christ, and Christ alone, is the source of every conceivable bit of spiritual knowledge worth having. False teachers may attempt to lead them astray with tantalizing talk of mysteries; but there was one mystery above all others – the mystery of God’s loving purpose, disclosed in Christ alone – and Paul’s concern was that they should come to know this all-surpassing mystery, and know it especially as an indwelling presence.

This verse is the christological high point of the epistle. It doesn’t quite rise to the exalted language of the Christ hymn of **1:15-20** but it expresses beautifully and compactly the cutting-edge point about Christ that’s Paul’s driving concern: Christ is the One in Whom is to be found all that one needs in order to understand spiritual reality and to lead a life that is pleasing to God. It’s in Jesus Christ that the wisdom and knowledge sought by the Colossians is to be found. Here again, Paul is using the terms his readers would understand, terms used by the purveyors of false truth, and he turns these terms in a new, more biblically sound direction.

Paul rarely uses the word treasure, but he does so here in relation to the wisdom and knowledge that is hidden in Christ. It serves to underscore the true value of these things that are found in Christ. The combination of the words hidden and treasure is a natural one, both in Paul’s day and in ours, since hiding the treasure was often the means of securing and protecting it. But, while these things are truly hidden in Christ, we should understand that they are also freely available in Christ. In fact, He grants them to all who faithfully and honestly seek them. They’re hidden in Christ in the sense that they’re treasures that have been deposited in Him and are now stored up in Him. Everything we might want to know about God and His purposes can and must now be answered in reference to the crucified and risen Christ. Anyone who comes to know Christ by faith can draw from His store all the wisdom and knowledge that has ever existed. Paul reminds us here that God’s truth is precious and worthy of sacrificial seeking.

**4-** Paul now explicitly warns the Colossians about false teaching. We can now see the practical purpose for Paul’s uplifting of Christ and all the treasures that are hidden in Him. It was to keep these believers from being deceived by fine-sounding arguments. Those false teachers who enticed the Colossians to seek after wisdom and knowledge apart from the simplicity of

Jesus were very persuasive. The lure of hidden and deep wisdom and knowledge can be both strong and deceptive. And again, Paul's not implying that they have already been deceived, but he clearly sees the danger and he's warning them about it. It may sound simple but deceivers are experts at deception. They don't announce their false doctrine as being false doctrine, and it will often be similar enough to the truth to be dangerous.

This same warning applies just as strongly to modern Christians: paying too much attention to the persuasive words of fine-sounding arguments can deceive us about religious and spiritual truth. Paul has no doubt about the vital importance of spiritual truth and he knows how perilously easy it is for believers (especially new ones) to be led astray by high-flying rhetoric or, as in our day, multimedia presentations. The antidote for such false teaching is the weighty proof of Christ's absolute supremacy and exclusivity. Religious or metaphysical mumbo-jumbo can't stand up against the clear and present truth stored up in the person Jesus Christ and the knowledge of Who He truly is.

**5-** Paul explains why he thinks it appropriate for him to issue warnings to believers he's never met. His reasoning is that, while he may be absent from them physically, he's present with them spiritually. This is what gives him the right to warn them even though he is under house arrest in Rome and far removed from the Colossians. Of course, Paul doesn't limit this to his own spirit but his spirit as it is taken up into the Holy Spirit. His presence with the Colossians is not just a simple "you're in my thoughts and prayers" but actually involves a profound corporate sense of identity, based on and mediated by the very Spirit of Christ. Paul thinks of them, feels for them and rejoices over them even though he is separated from them by such a great distance.

Paul then goes on to explain the confidence he has in their present standing. Continuing with the thought from the previous verse, Paul didn't see a Colossian church that was wholly given over to heresy. They were certainly under serious danger of it but it was Paul's understanding that at this time they were still in good order and displaying the steadfastness of their faith and he rejoices to see this. Paul derives satisfaction from their spiritual condition. The 2 terms, good order and steadfastness come from a military context. They describe an army that is solidly united against the enemy. Order describes the arrangement of the army in ranks, with each

soldier in his proper place. Steadfastness pictures the soldiers in battle formation, presenting a solid front to the enemy.

Paul is like a general inspecting his troops and rejoicing to see that they are displaying the disciplined formation and strong force that they will need to fight the false teachers. The Colossians started well but they've been perturbed by the new teaching and it may have made headway among some of them but they have not been thrown into disarray and are still holding to the truth of the gospel they have received.

The issue at stake in Colosse is still of considerable importance to the modern church. In an age that is just as religiously pluralistic as the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, can it reasonably be claimed that Christ can meet all the various spiritual aspirations of everyone? Paul's answer is an unequivocal, Yes! The reality is that if Jesus Christ is not able to meet the hopes and aspirations of all people, then He is not God incarnate, and He is not the Savior of the world. He is either everything the Bible says He is or He is nothing but a lunatic charlatan. While Scripture refutes the latter explicitly, we also have the evidence of millions of lives that have been radically and eternally transformed by faith in Him. That truth alone would not be possible if Jesus wasn't who the Bible says He is. 😊