

Colossians 2

The Fullness of God

Paul, under house arrest in Rome, has a daily concern for the young churches he has planted or knows about. In his spirit travail, he wants to communicate to them the ability to be found in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the whole centre of his world. As he magnifies Christ in his life and thought, he is empowered by the ascended Christ: 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' (Phil 4:13). Also 'I labour, striving according to His working (energy) which He works in me with power' (Col 1:29). Paul (and the believer) are empowered according to the empowerment of the Ascended Christ who is placed above all conceivable forms of power (Eph 1:20-22). This makes Christ the ultimate source of power and ability. In the Bible, power is a hierarchy. Power is granted or bestowed from above not shared among equals. The judge does not share the task of judgement.

2:1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and the ones in Laodicea and for as many who have not seen my face in the flesh.

Paul's struggle is a spirit struggle (Gk: agonizo). He is labouring in his spirit for the believers to bring forth revelation and to increase their knowledge of the will of God (Col 1:9). Laodicea is a nearby town (in western Turkey). He is also writing to those who do not know him personally (like us!).

2:2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been united together in love and in all the richness of the full assurance of understanding resulting in the knowledge of the mystery of God, which is Christ,

The goal of the Christian life is that the believers be united in love to one another and that they experience the wealth of the totally assured understanding of the knowledge of Christ.

2:3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and understanding.

Not all of knowledge and wisdom is found in Christ, only the treasures. This is the guarantee of Christ: as we follow Him we find and are immersed in wisdom and knowledge. These treasures are hidden. We have to dig in Christ to find them. We have to wrestle in Christ to uncover them. But we need look no further than Christ for wisdom and knowledge: we are complete in Him (2:10). This is an extraordinary statement for a knowledge-hungry (Greek philosophical) world. As the agent of creation, Jesus Christ is the source and guarantee of knowledge. What is found as truth in the world is also located in Christ. This is not saying that Jesus Christ is the only source of wisdom and knowledge. What it is saying is that when truth, wisdom and knowledge are located in the creation, it is consistent with the knowledge of Christ.

2:4-5 This I say so that no one will delude you with persuasive speech. For though I am absent in the flesh, I am present with you in the spirit, rejoicing and seeing your order and firmness in your faith in Christ.

Paul is particularly concerned about false teaching and wrong doctrine. People are destroyed by wrong doctrine (1Tim 1:11, 4:6, 2Pet 3:16). Paul affirms them in the place where they are in the spirit of solidarity and the faith of Christ.

2:6-7 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having taken root and being built up in Him and being firmly established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Once established in Christ we are to walk in Him, expressing faith, hope and love in a powerful spirit of thanksgiving.

2:8 Beware lest anyone of you be taken captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the universe and not according to Christ,

As believers who see the truth as consistent with Jesus Christ, we need to be careful that we are not captured (imprisoned) by man's philosophy and any form of intellectual deception which is, in fact, devoid of the truth as we know it in Christ. This is not saying that all philosophy is deception but that philosophy (and other methods) can be used to deceive. Presumably a godly philosophy can glorify God and lead to Christ. It is the emptiness and false teaching that is the problem, not necessarily the reasoning. Christianity is reasonable, but it reasons from revelation not observation. What we deduce from observation in the natural may not agree with or enhance the judgements of God. We have a security in Christ, intellectually, that is beyond philosophy. However, philosophy can be used to sustain (and validate) the wisdom and understanding that we can have in Christ.

2:9 because in Him [Christ] all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily.

This is strong Incarnational teaching. God is with us! All the fullness of Godhead dwells bodily in Jesus Christ. God has a body! Or God can be correctly conceived when He is conceived as having a body. Jesus Christ, as a Man, fully reveals God. This cuts right across our appetite for religious invention. We prefer our own ideas of what God must be like when all that can be said about God (that is relevant and correct) can be expressed in human form. We are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). This brings God very near. As we understand Jesus Christ we start to understand God. To the extent that God is understandable, that understanding is human based: humanity is the code for understanding. In fact, our bodies are the temple(s) of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 6:19).

2:10 and you are complete in Him who is the head of all principality and power.

This is the most extraordinary statement! Paul is saying that there is a completeness and adequacy in Christ that will meet every situation. It is Christ who is the adequacy, not us. I cannot as a Christian assert that I know or have everything in myself, but I do have it in Christ. In Christ I have all knowledge (1John 2:22, 27), all ability (Eph 3:20; Phil 4:13), all opportunity (Mtt 28:18-20). If Jesus Christ is above all things, then nothing can defeat Him. Ultimately, only Jesus Christ can vindicate His victory through me. Hopefully, the victory of Christ over ANY situation will be evident in me and my faith effort (Lk 18:8; Heb 11:6). We are also told in Jn 3:34, that God does not give His Spirit by measure. This means that when God gives us His Spirit we do not get it in instalments. When we have God we have all of God. We may not be able to appropriate all of God for our circumstances because of our unbelief and self-limitation on what God can do. Nevertheless, God gives us all of Himself in Jesus Christ. What a rich deposit this is in our spirit! By faith and by being in Jesus Christ, all things are possible. This is the capacity of God in me through Jesus Christ: I am complete in Him! Can you appropriate (get hold of) this, by faith, for your circumstances?

2:11 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body (of the sins) of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

Circumcision was the sign of the Jewish male as given to Abraham (Gen 17:11). It was a sign of the covenant that God made with

Abraham (Gen 17:7). Circumcision was a sign of Jewishness and belonging to the people of God. But Paul argues that faith is prior to circumcision because Abraham received the sign of circumcision while yet uncircumcised himself (Rom 4:9-12). What is more, Paul argues that Judaisers seek to glory in believer's bodies by having them circumcised as a sign of the covenant of Moses rather than conforming to Christ. Paul takes hold of the metaphor of circumcision and uses it to refer to the putting off of the flesh which is an enemy of the spirit. This he calls the circumcision of Christ.

2:12 being buried together with Him in baptism you were raised together in Him through the faith of the working of God, having raised Him from the dead.

Paul changes the metaphor from the removal of the flesh in circumcision to being buried with Christ in the waters of baptism. Just as the believer goes down under the water in baptism, he arises out of the water of baptism into the resurrection life of Christ (Rom 6:3-6). This is all the doing of God. This is the Christian life in which we walk. Paul's letters are to make us aware of this new capacity for life in Christ.

2:13-14a And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him having forgiven all the trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting in the ordinances [the Law] which was contrary to us.

While we were still sinners and powerless to help ourselves, Christ intervened for us (Rom 5:8). Paul, who was seriously into the Law, realised that he could not meet the requirements of the Law. No one can meet the requirements of justice, particularly the requirements of a holy God. People who live the Christian life by a code of justice can only meet certain requirements. They cannot be entirely just (or righteous) in their own efforts. They are following some worldly idea of justice, for instance, comparing the 'haves' with the 'have-nots' or the powerless with the powerful. Whereas these distinctions do exist, we cannot right the wrongs (that is God's task in judgement) although we can minister in these situations. Jesus never talked about making the poor rich or the politically powerless powerful. In the name of Christ, we serve.

2:14b And He has taken it [the handwriting] out of the way having nailed it to the Cross.

The Cross is the new event. The Cross is the central mechanism by which God through Jesus Christ deals with the requirements of the law and enters into covenant with His creation. If we act on it, the Cross changes everything, because God looks on the Cross and changes judgement. To come to God by means of the Cross finds for us forgiveness of sin, the absolute cleansing of conscience (Heb 9:14) and the life of total possibility. 'All things are possible to him who believes' (Mk 9:23). Unbelief is sin: 'that which is not from faith is sin' (Rom 14:23). The Cross is not about us meeting God's requirements (which is Law) but God meeting His requirements (which is Grace). This is the pivotal change brought about by Calvary. I then live out of grace and I strive to fight the good fight of faith (1Tim 6:12). Faith says that I must live out of what God shows me. There are **three signs** of what God is showing us to do:

- 1) It will be impossible. (We can do the possible ourselves.)
- 2) It must require faith (otherwise it is sin).
- 3) God decides how it will be used. (After all it is an offering to Him. We often will not do something because we think it useless, irrelevant, unnecessary or ineffective. Trust God for the outcome!)

2:15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it [the Cross].

Ancient Rome would have victory processions celebrating their victory over conquered nations. Through the Cross, Jesus Christ has conquered the formidable nation of evil.

2:16-17 So let no one judge you in what you eat or drink or in what you celebrate such as festivals, new moons or Sabbaths which are a shadow of things to come; but the substance [body, reality] belongs to Christ.

The reality belongs to Christ. He is all we need and we need all He is. Religious performance impresses the flesh not the spirit.

2:18-19 Let no one deprive you of the prize by delighting in humble-mindedness and the veneration of angels, by someone who is delving into things he has seen [visions], being puffed up by his fleshy mind and not holding fast to the Head from whom all the body, fully supplied through joints and ligaments and being united together, grows with a growth that is from God.

Once again Jesus Christ is the source. We should be sure of our revelation is Christ that is consistent with who Christ is.

2:20-23 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe [the basic mechanisms of nature which pagans worship] why do you submit yourselves to ordinances as though you still lived in the world - do not touch, do not taste, do not handle - which things are all destined to deteriorate with use according to the commandments and teachings of men? These things have the appearance of self-imposed religion [will worship], humble-mindedness and severity to the body but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh [rather they encourage it].

Human beings analyse reality and worship the concepts and mechanisms that they isolate by their analysis. They say Science explains everything. Religion can be used to control people.