

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE
COLOSSIANS

DAY
8 - 14

DAY 8 - Treasure hidden in Christ

Read Colossians 2:1-3

1 I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. **2** My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, **3** in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Here Paul is expressing his desires as a suffering servant of the Gospel, with each sentence building on the previous one.

The ultimate aim of his life is to help them to 'know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' Just as we have seen before, again Paul is speaking of the unique position Jesus holds. In doing so he is both showing them the centrality of Jesus Christ to their lives, and (as we shall see tomorrow), reminding them that it is *only* in Christ that wisdom and knowledge can be found.

No other teaching, philosophy, culture or person can offer what is to be found in Jesus Christ. He wants them to continue in Christ alone, because there is no other real way. There is no treasure hidden anywhere other than in Christ.

Paul is giving his life for this Gospel and cares about them: he seeks to encourage their hearts and help them to be united together in love as they follow Jesus Christ.

Earlier in Chapter 1:27 Paul had spoken of Christ and said 'To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory.**'

Christ is not only the source of all wisdom and understanding, but he lives in us and is the hope of our future glory when he returns and we live with him into eternal life.

This is the one we can follow and give our whole lives to just as Paul is desperate for them to continue doing.

Questions

Do I remember how extraordinary Jesus Christ is?

Do I look to Jesus when searching for Wisdom and Understanding?

What would it look like for us to be 'united in love'?

Actions

Spend some time worshipping Jesus.

Look at what sources of wisdom are in your life and whether these are pointing you to Jesus or not.

Pray and ask God to help you to follow him alone.

DAY 9 - Firm Faith in Christ

Read Colossians 2:1-5

We read verses 1-3 yesterday, but we'll read them again today to see how Paul moves from these verses into a direct encouragement about how they are living their lives and potential challenges they are facing.

1 I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. **2** My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, **3** in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. **4** I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. **5** For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

Paul here addresses a direct challenge to the life of following Christ. We saw in chapter 1 that he was encouraged by their faith, and we see that here too, but with a word of caution.

There seems to have been some false teaching around the life of the church in Colossae, which Paul hints at here in verse 4. Unlike Galatians though for example, where false teaching seems to have taken over the church, here it seems more to be on the edges. We can see that as Paul in verse 5 immediately says 'I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how **firm your faith in Christ is**'.

It seems that there is not a rebuke here, but a healthy warning about those who would seek to 'deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.' He will get more specific later in the letter about some false teaching, but we see here an important part of discipleship: being wise about what is the truth of Christ and what isn't, even when things sound good to our ears.

There is no action we can do, or sacrifice we can make in our lives, that can get us closer to God. There is only one way to be reconciled to God and to live a flourishing life both now and into eternal life: the only way is Jesus Christ. There is nothing left undone by Christ that we have to do.

If you are a Christian then that might not be brand new information, but it can be so easy to know that and yet let legalism, or self-righteousness through sacrifice creep into the way we see God and ourselves.

Paul is showing them that nothing other, or more, than Christ is need for salvation and to fulfil their lives.

Questions

What are some 'fine sounding arguments' that our culture says to us?

How am I keeping Jesus at the centre of my life?

Are there bits of wrong thinking that creep into my relationship with God?

Actions

Read Galatians 3 and see what false teaching was present there.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you have Jesus Christ at the centre of your life today.

Read Colossians 1:11-23 and spend some time worshipping and thanking God for who he is and what he has done. There is no one else more worthy of our lives than him.

DAY 10 - Living in Christ

Read Colossians 2:6-10

- 6** So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, **7** rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.
- 8** See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.
- 9** For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, **10** and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

Paul continues his warning about following any other way of life other than that taught by Jesus and his Apostles. He first brings encouragement in how we can be strong in our faith, continuing to live in Christ.

He uses metaphors of plants or trees whose roots make them strong and a building being firmly built up. These both speak of real strength that comes from living our lives in Christ. The source of this strength is found only in the true gospel of Jesus Christ which has been taught to them by Epaphras and Paul. For us too, this rootedness and strength can only come from building our lives on the teaching of the Bible.

Then Paul warns them directly about the potential for other teachings to creep into their lives. This is incredibly important because these other teachings, although potentially well meaning, lead to captivity.

As Paul reminds them in verse 10, the only place we can find freedom and fullness is in Christ. Christ, who he again here in verses 9-10 (as he had done in Chapter 1:15-20), reminds them is God himself.

He draws a clear distinction between the true gospel of Jesus Christ (taught and demonstrated by Jesus himself and his Apostles of which Paul is one) and any other teaching of 'philosophy' or way of life. He wants them to see that everything built on Christ leads to fullness, but anything else is 'hollow and deceptive'.

Anything else is built on nothing but fleeting human traditions and powers that Christ has already defeated through his death and resurrection.

It is important for us to spend time reading the Gospels and the letters in the New Testament if we are going to live lives that are 'rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith'.

A life built on anything other than Christ is a life that is not only built on something that is hollow and deceptive (which in itself is such a waste of time), but is also a life that misses out on the fullness that comes from Christ.

Although we live in a different time and place to those first receiving this letter, we also need to be careful not to allow the ideas of our current culture to take us captive. We also need to be aware of false teaching that presents itself as 'Christian', but would seek to add or take away from the truth in the Bible. The best way we can do that is to read our Bibles, be part of a good church and life group, and ask Church ministers and respected people questions when we have them about things we are not sure about.

Let us take the encouragement from Paul in verses 6-7 that we read earlier: So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

At the end of this sentence he reminds us, as he did in chapter 1, that thankfulness to God for all he has done should never be far from our lips as Christians. Let this be our prayer for one another.

Questions

Do I hold the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles as the most important teachings in my life?

Are there areas of life where, if I'm honest, I am building my life on something other than Jesus?

Do I trust God that only in Him can I find the fullness in life I am looking for?

Actions

Read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 and think about how you could do something that Jesus teaches there in your life.

Make a plan with someone else to read the New Testament together across 6 months or a year.

Read Matthew 7:24-27. Invite the Holy Spirit to show where your life is built on the sand and where it is built on the Rock.

Build a time (it can be a short time) of thankfulness to God into your day.

DAY 11 - Buried with Christ

Read Colossians 2:9-15

9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, **10** and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. **11** In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, **12** having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. **13** When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, **14** having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. **15** And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Today we'll focus on verses 9-14 and tomorrow we'll look at verse 15. Having reminded them again that Christ is God, and that Christ has brought them into fullness (there is nothing else for them to do in order to be complete other than receiving Christ), Paul then uses the images of circumcision and baptism to speak of the transformation that has happened through Christ.

In Chapter 3:9-10 Paul will say that they have 'taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self'.

In Baptism we demonstrate that we are leaving our old life behind and are putting our faith in Christ to save us and to raise us to new life on Earth now (Chapter 3 begins with this being the driving force of our life), and into eternal life. Our faith is in him because he was raised from the dead in victory. His victory in resurrection will lead to our resurrection to eternal life with Christ.

Paul spoke of this more in his letter to the Church in Corinth. In **1 Corinthians 15:20-26** he wrote:

20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. **21** For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. **22** For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. **23** But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. **24** Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. **25** For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. **26** The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

This future resurrection is what Paul was describing in Chapter 1:5 Paul spoke of 'the faith and love that spring from the **hope** stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel.' The hope stored up for us in heaven is Christ's return and our resurrection with him into glory. Both the life we have been raised to live now and the eternal life promised to us would impact the way we live our lives.

Verse 13 then dramatically brings them back to their life before Christ, ('**dead in your sins**'), and the gracious gift of salvation offered by Jesus. It is while they (and we) were dead in their sins that '**God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us**'. In

Romans 5:6-8 Paul said a similar thing:

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. **7** Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. **8** But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

In verse 14 here in Colossians 2, Paul also speaks of the reality that, before receiving Christ, we were not only in darkness, but our sin meant we also stood condemned before Holy God. We were not only separated from God, but unable to ever make a way to him.

Without Christ we could never be reconciled to God: without Christ we could never have a restored relationship with God...but Christ *has* forgiven us and *has* cancelled the charge that condemned us, opening the door to reconciliation and redemption.

How has Jesus done this?

We see in verses 14 and 15, (as so often in Colossians) that it is through the brutal and painful death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Our sin, and the resulting condemnation, was nailed to the cross. We saw in Chapter 1:19 how this removal of sin and condemnation was *'to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.'* The cross is the way we are reconciled to God. We see the lengths God was willing to go to to make a way for us to be in relationship with him.

Questions

Why would God be willing to suffer so much to be in relationship with me?

How often do I thank God for what he did on the cross?

How much does the future hope of Christ's return and eternal life impact my thoughts or my faith or my love for other people?

What does it look like to be raised with Christ now?

Actions

Share the communion meal with someone and spend some time thanking God for what he did on the cross.

Read 1 Corinthians 15 to learn more about the resurrection that we will enjoy with Christ.

Read John 11 to see Jesus speak of the resurrection and to demonstrate his authority over death on Earth.

Read Matthew 6:19-24 and Matthew 19:16-30 and allow the Holy Spirit to help you to desire treasure in heaven. Invite him to continue to transform your heart to build your life only in his Kingdom.

DAY 12 - The Triumph of the Cross

Read Colossians 2:9-15

9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, **10** and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. **11** In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, **12** having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. **13** When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, **14** having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. **15** And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

We read this passage yesterday, but today we will focus on the last verse.

Yesterday we saw that at the Cross, Christ dealt with our sin, and the condemnation we stood under because of it. Today we will see how the consequences of the Cross extend across the entirety of creation.

In verse 15 Paul says: And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Paul is describing the complete and utter victory over everything that stands against his plans in the world, whether demons, Satan, governments, philosophies, teachings, laws or systems. Anything spiritual or worldly that opposes God has been:

1. Disarmed by God
2. Made a public spectacle of God
3. Triumphed over by God

And we see again here that this has all happened 'by the cross'. The cross was the most brutal and torturous way to kill someone whilst also publicly humiliating someone. Jesus was made a public spectacle in his death. For Jesus to be crucified appeared to demonstrate his utter defeat at the hands of his own creation and the powers and authorities opposed to God's plans on the Earth. And yet it is here in this moment of apparent defeat that Jesus Christ was actually victorious not only in taking our sin, but also in bringing about a humiliating defeat over the very forces that stand against him and us.

Our sin and condemnation was wiped away at the cross and every force against God has been utterly crushed and defeated at the cross. We can live free from our sin and free from these forces when we are in Christ. It makes no sense to Paul for us to receive Christ and then build our lives on principles or teachings or spiritual forces that Christ has utterly conquered and that oppose him.

The death of Jesus Christ is the most significant event in the history of creation and so ought to be at the very centre of their lives. We are encouraged throughout this letter (and the rest of the New Testament) to keep Christ's death and resurrection and the centre of our lives. Our lives have been rescued because of Christ and we should consistently overflow with thanksgiving as we remember Christ and build our whole lives on him alone.

Our baptism spoke of our entry into his death and resurrection and our claim that his death and resurrection is now ours. It stands as a reminder of the fact that it is only in Christ's death, not my works, that I am saved and made holy. Remember Paul's words from Chapter 1:22: 'But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation'.

Questions

What do I think of when I think of the Cross?

Are there areas of my life where I am building on teaching or thinking that is against God's word?

Have you been baptised?

Actions

Spend some time thanking God for all he has done for us.

Invite the Holy Spirit to highlight any areas of your life that he is not a part of. Spend some time listening and invite him into those places.

Read Colossians 1:9-12 and pray for God to fill you as Paul prays and invite God to help continue to transform you so that you can bear fruit.

DAY 13 - Christ has done it all

Read Colossians 2:16-19

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. **17** These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. **18** Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. **19** They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Paul here addresses specifically some false teaching that is present in or around the church. He begins with 'Therefore' so we know that his basis for teaching is on what has just come before. He is building on the truth of what Christ has done on the cross. You can read yesterday's passage for a reminder.

It is not clear exactly what is being taught here, or from whom, but what is clear is that Paul is seeking to show them that they do not need to listen to anything that suggests we need to add something to the work of Christ. We won't go through everything in this passage, but let's look at two possible errors that might have been present (and are still today) that take people away from the truth in Christ.

The first is that the people need to keep certain religious festivals (possibly Jewish festivals) and legal requirements in order to be holy before God. This could well have come from Jewish converts in the church or from other traditions around Colossae. In Galatians Paul passionately rebukes them for seeking to be justified by the actions rather than faith in Christ. Here though, Paul encourages them with the concrete reality of Christ. Anything from the Old Testament was always leading to Christ. Anything in the world is only a shadow compared to the reality of Christ.

Nothing we can do can add to the work of Christ, yet so easily we can slip into believing we can earn our way into God's favour through good behaviour, or disqualify ourselves from God's love when we sin. This can feel right, but it is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul calls us to live a different way having received Christ, but never as a way to earn favour or forgiveness from God.

The second error is the idea that through self-discipline and denying ourselves of physical pleasures or indulgences, we can be purified or have the ability to experience or know God better than others. This is called Asceticism. This seems to have been a potential problem in Colossae (although, as we saw from chapter 1, it had not taken root in the church). They are not to let anyone judge them because of the eating or drinking because those things do not hinder our access to Christ or make us any more or less holy. There is no formula to get close to God, because Christ has done it all. We mustn't think others are more or less holy than ourselves because of how much they fast or pray for example (although these are great things to do), instead we should all look to Christ together as the source of our holiness.

Whatever the specific concerns for Paul here were, what is clear is that anything outside of the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles results in a disconnect from Christ. That makes sense when we remember that these false teachings, however much they appear to have humility within them, actually seek to take power and authority away from Christ and put it onto ourselves.

In verse 19 Paul says that those who seek to live 'have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.' This is a devastating reality and acts as a warning to those who might get tempted into this false version of Christianity. To be separated from Christ is to choose to go back into slavery and darkness that Christ has rescued us from. They will miss out on the incredible life that God has for them if they try and remove Christ as their head and replace him with false teaching.

Questions

Do you find yourself slipping into a legalistic view of your Christian faith?

Have you allowed the belief that some people are more holy than others based on what titles or religious practices?

Do you ever find it challenging to live under grace, knowing that our entire lives, salvation and holiness are a gift of grace through Christ?

Actions

Invite the Holy Spirit to help examine your heart for any legalism. Turn away from it and thank God for his forgiveness and the truth of the Gospel.

Invite the Holy Spirit to help examine your heart for any asceticism. Turn away from it and thank God for his forgiveness and the truth of the Gospel.

Spend some time thanking God for the finished work of Christ through his death and resurrection.

DAY 14 - We have died with Christ

Read Colossians 2:20-23

20 Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: **21** "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? **22** These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. **23** Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

As we saw in 2:12, to be a Christian is to die and rise with Christ. Christ has conquered all powers and authorities that stood against him. We see here expressed the total nature of what Christ has rescued them from:

- Spiritual forces of the world
- The rules of the world
- Food laws
- Human tradition
- False humility and 'wisdom'
- Self-denial

It's a very comprehensive summary of a form of spirituality that might make us *look* wise, knowledgeable or spiritual, but is actually *useless* for helping us live the transformed life that we are called to live in Christ.

Not only that, but behind all of this lies a bigger threat to the truth of Christ. All of these ways of living place me at the centre of the story. Holiness, wisdom and revelation of God can be achieved, according to these forms of spirituality, through our own efforts. This is an attractive offer to any human being. There is apparent clarity about what to do in life, and a great sense of control over our own destinies. The problem is that it is simply not true, and feeds our egos even as we attempt to serve God. It is a complete waste of time and effort. It does not work. Christ has already won all of this for us.

Paul spoke similarly in his letter to Timothy. In **1 Timothy 4:1-5** he said:

1 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. **2** Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. **3** They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. **4** For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, **5** because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

The next section at the beginning of chapter 3 (which we'll look at tomorrow) speaks of how we have been raised with Christ, but for now Paul focuses on the fact that they (and we) have died with Christ. Remember Paul's words from Chapter 1:22: 'But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation'. Their holiness, wisdom etc. is all given freely in Christ, so they should not slip back into following teachings or rules that suggest otherwise. If they do, they are walking back into darkness and slavery.

As we have said previously, these false teachings do not seem to have made it into the heart of the Church, but if we look to the book of Galatians, where false teaching was hugely influencing the church, we see the warning loud and clear. In **Galatians 3:8-11** Paul wrote:

8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. **9** But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? **10** You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! **11** I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

Questions

Do you find it difficult not to slip back into self-righteousness?

Do you feel that others are more holy before God than you because of what they do/don't do?

Do you feel that you are more holy before God than others because of what you do/don't do?

Do you find it hard not to listen to teachings of our culture over the truth of the Bible?

Actions

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any areas of your life where you are submitting to the 'rules' of the world.

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any areas that you have split into self-righteousness.

Confess anything of those to God and ask the Holy Spirit to help you live according to the truth.

Spend some time thanking God for his death and that we can claim his death as our own.