

Colossians 2:1-5

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[0 : 00] I turn to Colossians chapter 1, verses 1-5, on page 983 in the Church Bibles.

I have a friend who said to me, this week I listen to your sermons when I jog. I said, well, I'm not sure about that. And he said, well, my wife listens to your sermons in bed.

So I think there's a cure for insomnia probably. But I don't want to think about it really. So many of us download lots of sermons, I'm sure. But I wonder whether some preaching is being trivialised by its popularity.

That seems strange, doesn't it? But when sermons are downloaded by the hundreds, not the minor, and played like pop music on the iPad, iPod, as you jog, I do think there's something strange about that.

I hear you ask, what's your problem? So if you're going to jog, what better thing to jog to than to listen to the Word of God? And you may have a point, but I wonder about it. And I want us to consider tonight, carefully if we can, the way in which God works at growing mature Christians.

[1 : 24] And so today we come to chapter 2 in verses 1-5, where Paul takes that general truth about the sermon of the Gospel that he outlined last week. And he outlines, what does that mean for the hearers of the letter?

And it seems to me that the earnestness of Paul's point, kind of the letter becomes more intense. Can you see that in verse 1 of chapter 2? For I want you to know, he says.

Now I've got no doubt that Paul wants them to know everything he's written in the book of Colossians. That's why he wrote it. But perhaps because this point is so important for them, that it could easily be missed, he underlines the point.

He says, I really want you to know this. And what he wants you to know is, I've battled with this week. He wants us to know about his great struggle in serving the Gospel.

And who it's been for. That's what Paul wants you to know. And it's worth asking, why does he so earnestly want them to know this? It's very easy, I think, when we hear, I really want you to know this.

[2 : 30] To think that the desire is kind of slightly less than worthy. So there are many Christians, aren't there, these days. And especially Christian ministers who are in some kind of ministry.

And they want everyone to know how hard they're working. And you never meet some people, do you? How are you? And their response is, I'm tired. And you see, if you or I were saying verse 1, I really want you to know how great a struggle I have for you.

I think we question the other person's motives. Is Paul's motive here to attract sympathy? Does he want the Colossians to think, oh, he works so hard. He's more committed to us than others.

Because he talks about how hard he works. I don't think it's that. Neither do I think he's trying to provide a model for Christian ministry. For other servants to aspire to.

That's not his point. It's actually more important than any of those things. Paul wants you and I to understand, and the readers in Colossae, to appreciate the way that God was working. To bring them to maturity in the Christian faith.

[3 : 36] I want you to know, and it will be for your own good. So we have to see the purpose of what Paul wants his readers to know. He's already hinted at it, doesn't he?

In chapter 1 and verse 23. Where, do you remember, Paul spoke of the absolute necessity of persisting in faith. If indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast.

He wants them to be established and not shifting from the gospel which they heard. And that's why he said, this gospel of which I, Paul, became a servant and minister. And since then he's been expanding on what is his role as a servant of the gospel.

And so in verse 23, I think he's hinting at a danger, isn't he? A danger of not continuing. And it's a danger that will be very clear as we move through chapter 2 in the coming weeks. Namely, that's not persisting in faith. Not being established and firm and rooted in the gospel. But in fact, shifting from it. The gospel that you heard.

[4 : 42] And it's in order to prevent that from happening. That our attention is drawn so carefully and fully to the work of Paul. The servant of the gospel. Now that is the context of what I want you to know in chapter 2 verse 1.

There's a great deal that's at stake. He wants the Christian believers in Colossae and elsewhere to know and understand what are God's ways with the gospel. How God works through the servants of the gospel so they will not shift from it.

And so this brief paragraph has got three points, I think. It's got the first point which is the work he wants them to understand. And then it's got the danger that they should avoid in verse 4. And thirdly, the joy that is already working in them. So let's try and understand the work that he wants them to understand. And Paul's description of the work here begins by underlining his kind of own exhausting labour for the gospel.

Chapter 2 verse 1. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those that lay in the sea down the valley. And for all who have not seen me face to face. I want you to know how much I agonise.

[5 : 51] He's picking up his knee on what he said in chapter 1 and verse 29. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. So what exactly is Paul talking about?

What is the struggle? What did he actually do that is toil? And is this great struggle? Because I don't think it was laboring over the commentaries and the Greek text.

I don't think it was that. What was his struggle? Well there are at least two strenuous activities I think he's referring to. The first was his praying.

Struggling in prayer. And so if you doubt that the word toil and struggle, that language can be a reference to something as simple as praying. Just turn over to the end of the letter and see how Paul uses the word again.

Chapter 4 and verse 12. Do you see that Hippocris? So Epocris was doing all that Paul was doing.

[7 : 07] Oh a glorious concorporation of God. There's great to have children here. You don't need to go anywhere. You can stay. We love Gabriel. It's great to have him here. So Paul has already told us this.

We have a struggle for praying with Epaphras. He's already told us chapter 1 and verse 9. That he did not cease praying for the Colossian believers. And so part of the struggle that he wants them to know is his prayers for them.

And he's already told them what he's praying for them. Chapter 1 and verse 9. We've not ceased to pray for you. Asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And now he said, I want you to know how great a struggle I have.

And this is what the gospel servant does. And praying, this kind of praying that he has talked about in Colossians, is a struggle.

And praying takes effort. And praying takes discipline. I find that wonderfully reassuring, actually. I want you to know that, says Paul.

[8 : 16] And I want you to know that the struggle is happening. We often think, didn't we, Paul just must have spent hours upon hours upon hours praying. I must have done it without any problem.

But I don't think that's the case. I think Colossians is really helpful. But the struggle of praying. The second strenuous activity is mentioned in verse 28 of chapter 1. Him, that is, he proclaims Christ. He warns everyone and teaches everyone in all wisdom. And that is very hard work. It was that activity that brought on Paul the sufferings that he spoke of in verse 24.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake. Everywhere, everywhere, there's proclamation of Christ is opposed with hostility.

It's either open or it's maybe more underhand. But more than that, to work hard at persuasion. To work hard, verse 28, at urgent warning.

[9 : 28] At careful instruction and teaching of every possible person. And that is hard, hard work. And Paul now says, I want you to know how great a struggle I had.

For you and for those who lay in this here. And for all who have not seen me face to face. I want you to know that this arduous work in prayer and proclamation has been for, can you see that? For you. And for others like you, of course. How come? How was Paul, whom they'd never met, working so hard for them? We'll look at the bold purpose of his toil in verses 2 and 3.

The purpose is that their hearts may be encouraged. Being lived together in love. To reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding. And the knowledge of God's mystery which is in Christ. In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I'm proclaiming Christ. No matter how much effort it takes. And I am praying with all the energy that God gives me. To see a deep and profound income in your lives. What is that outcome?

[10:36] Well, verse 2 is encouraged hearts. That's what he's leaving for. That at the centre of your person. At the centre of your lives. Paul is struggling. That you would know the comfort and the courage that knowing Jesus Christ brings.

A loving unity. That's the second thing, isn't it? That having your hearts knit together in love. Paul is struggling. That you believers would know the powerful bond of love that knowing Christ gives. You're not on your own. Thirdly, rich assurance. How precious it is, isn't it? To understand. To know God's glorious purpose for the nations of the world.

What deep confidence that understanding Christ brings. One translation put it very well. The full wealth of conviction that understanding brings.

Paul was struggling. That you believers would know that. In chapter 1 verse 28. He's described the purpose of his labour. In terms of its final goal. That we may present everyone mature in Christ.

[11:41] And now he wants you to know. His strenuous work. To that end for you. And just in case any of us are particularly dull. And not yet particularly clear.

We have a tendency to be like that. He tells them again the secret for which he's working hard. That they might know the knowledge of God's mystery.

That secret that has been revealed. Which is Christ. That they would know and understand. And be impacted by the secret again. Which is Christ. In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

He is after all is needed. One on whom all things depend. And as we saw in chapter 1 and verse 27. Christ in you. That is in you Gentiles. That is the hope of glory.

Certain Old Testament books like Proverbs. Ecclesiastes. Job. Speak about wisdom don't they? Human beings. You and I need to live in God's world.

[12:42] Wisely. And that's difficult. To find wisdom. And precious. So where does this wisdom come from? Where's the place of understanding?

It's hidden from the eyes of all living. And concealed from the birds of the air. Job says. But in verse 28. Paul says the secret is now out.

All the treasures of wisdom. Sorry verse 3. In verse all the treasures of wisdom. And knowledge. And understanding. Are in Christ. You can be perfectly sure therefore.

That Paul never taught the Old Testament. Without teaching Christ. It is he. All the treasures of wisdom. And knowledge. And understanding. Are hidden in him. And now the claim is astonishing. As we follow out through the rest of Paul's letter. We'll understand more of what this means. We know what it doesn't mean don't we? We know that it doesn't mean. That once you know Christ. You automatically hear all the answers.

[13:44] To everything in life. All of life's questions and challenges. If that was the case. There'd be no reason for the letter. But he is saying. The wealth and the wisdom.

And the knowledge. And the understanding. Are to be found in Jesus Christ. And it's so vast. That we can expect to be exploring it all our days. We must realise.

That the claim of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Is immense. What the philosophers have sought down through the centuries. What ordinary people long for.

Wisdom to live well. Is found in Jesus Christ. And I want you to know Paul says. That that is the great struggle that I'm engaged in. So that Christ will be known among you.

Many commentators. I want to say. The last phrase of verse 1. And for all who haven't seen me. Haven't seen me face to face.

[14:39] It just means the other valleys. In that kind of region. Laodicean region. Where Paul had not visited. But I think Paul had much much more in mind. Paul knew he was the apostle to the Gentiles.

To the nations. He saw his work in the context of the whole world. Chapter 1 verse 6. Actually. In the context of the whole of creation.

All of creation under heaven. Look at that chapter 1 and verse 23. Which has been proclaimed in all of creation under heaven. Of which Paul, I Paul became a minister. So there's no reason to restrict the end.

The verse. At the end of verse 1. So it includes you and I. We are the beneficiaries. Of Paul's struggle.

And as we read this letter. We are the very direct beneficiaries. Of his great struggle. Of his strenuous efforts. To see Christ known among the nations. And we like the assembly of the Colossian believers.

[15 : 44] We need to know that. And we ought to know that. Now there's a very specific reason. Why Paul wrote in this way. There's the danger. Can you look at verse 4? I say this.

In order that no one may. Delude you. With plausible arguments. Plausible or persuasive arguments.

Depending on what version of the Bible you've got. It's the same word. That is the danger. It's already been alluded to. In chapter 1 and verse 23. Which led to the kind of long treatment.

As him as a servant of the gospel. And we should now. We should be quite clear. Why we need to appreciate. The role of the gospel servant. It is because the very real danger.

Of being deceived. That if Christ is the one on whom all things. Including us depend on for our existence. And for our reconciliation.

[16 : 42] If the blood of Jesus Christ has the power to heal creation. If Christ is the hope of the world. Then to be turned away from the truth. Is massively serious danger.

Isn't it? So I hope you've noticed. That those who most believe the gospel. And care most about the truth.

Take the danger of deception. Most seriously. Don't they? Let me repeat that. But those who believe the gospel most.

And care most about the truth. Take the danger of deception. Most seriously. Of course we do. Precisely because the truth is so good. Isn't it?

And the truth is so important. Why? What would it take to deceive us? What do we need to be aware of. That has the power to deceive? The first thing is.

[17 : 39] Persuasive speech. Or plausible arguments. I don't think the apostle Paul knew. That there was a particular problem in Colossae.

It's often thought there was specific erroneous teaching. That Paul knew was being promoted in Colossae. And he had that in mind. And that is possible. There's something to explore in that. But it seems to me the language here is more general.

It's the kind of thing which needs to be said to Christians. At any time. In any place. Who are not likely to be deceived. We are not likely to be deceived.

By anything but persuasive speech. Unpersuasive speech. Will not deceive you. Will it? Implausible arguments.

Will not deceive you. Unimpressive arguments won't deceive you. It will take persuasive speech. Plausible arguments. To deceive you. And so it's persuasive speech.

[18 : 40] That you need to be aware of. And what does persuasive speech sound like? It sounds right. Doesn't it? It's persuasive. And the more right it sounds.

The more dangerous it is. If it's not right. Now I take it across. The persuasive speech. In itself. Is neutral. Persuasive speech.

Can be used to persuade you of the truth. Has it? Persuasive speech. But persuasive speech. Can also be used. To deceive you. The letters of the Colossians. Is actually a really good example.

Of persuasive speech. But the point is. That it shouldn't just be admired. For its quality. That quality can be deceptive. Just as well.

As it can warn. And teach the truth. And that is why. We need to recognize. That the true servant of the gospel. Who very often. Very very often. Will not be.

[19 : 35] Be impressive. He suffers. Do you remember? You need to know. And appreciate. The labors. Of the apostle Paul. For you. So that no one.

Will deceive you. With persuasive speech. You need to know. And appreciate. The labors. Of those sermons. For the gospel. Who labor. For you today. As Paul did. And so not.

Be deceived. By persuasive speech. Well you might say. Well what is it. Are you telling me. Are you telling me. That God's great purpose.

For the world. That mystery. Now revealed to the nations. Which is hidden in Christ. The hope of the nations. Of the world. Rests. On the labors. Of the like. Of Paul. And it can be undone.

By the persuasive speech. Of others. Does the plan of God. For his creation. Really hang by such a thin thread. Yes it does.

[20 : 33] And that is why. Every advance of the gospel. Every time we hear of faith. In Christ Jesus. Among the nations. Every person.

Who persists in faith. Established and firm. Every person. That will not shift. From the gospel. The hope of the gospel. Every time it happens. And everywhere it happens.

We thank God. For his work. And he is doing it. The struggles of Paul. The toil of gospel servants. Are achieving their purposes.

Because it is God's purpose. And it is God's purpose. To do it like this. And so Paul is writing his letter.

Not full of anxiety. Or full of distress. But thirdly. Full of joy. Full of joy. Look at verse five. For though I am absent in body. Yet I am with you. In spirit.

[21 : 28] That's the kind of thing. I say when I don't want to go to wellness meeting. That I'm not with you in body. But I'll be with you in spirit. Or something like that. But it means much more than that. He is with them.

In his thoughts. He is with them. In the spirit. I'm not absolutely certain. That it can't be a capital S. Actually. He is heard of their love.

In the spirit. For all the saints. In chapter one. In verse four. And verse eight. There is a spiritual bond.

That the spirit creates. Between all those who are in Christ Jesus. All who have joined that assembly. Of which Christ is the head.

And it is a bond. That distance. Well distance like Colossae and Rome. Does nothing to weaken. And being with them. In this very real sense. He is rejoicing.

[22 : 27] Do remember that he began. This whole discussion of his role. As a servant of the gospel. In chapter one. Verse twenty four. That now he's become. A servant of the gospel. Now I rejoice. Verse twenty four.

And he rounds off. This section of the letter. Which I think is the kind of grand. The end of the grand introduction. Of the letter. By returning to this joy. Chapter one in verse five.

Chapter two in verse five. And what he sees. And I take it. This is what Epaphras has told. Reports to him.

Is your order. Can you see that? Your good order. And the firmness of your faith in Christ. What does that mean? Sounds so boring.

Doesn't it? Rejoicing to see your good order. And the firmness of your faith in Christ. What does that mean? It means this. Life is put back. Together again.

[23 : 22] With Christ as our head. When we are reconciled to him. By his death. Lives are put back. In order. Later in the letter.

We will learn more about the order of life. In Christ. But here Paul tells us something. To be very pleased about. It's so good. When life is put back. In order. And ordered lives.

Come from firm faith. In Christ. Since all the wisdom. And treasures. Are to be found in him. Firm faith in him. Is absolutely.

The very best. Basis. For ordering lives. Your friends. Like I do. And their lives. Are just.

Absolute chaos. And their family. Situations. Are. Are just. All over the place. And they try to explain. Their family situations. And it's.

[24 : 16] It's nearly impossible. To kind of understand. Kind of. It's so higgly. Figgly. What do your friends need? They need to come to faith.

In Christ. And it is. Christ. Who puts their lives. Sometimes slowly. Back into good order. And puts them firm in the faith. That is how lives are meant to be ordered.

That is how the universe. Is meant to be ordered. Beware of the danger of being deceived. Don't be deceived. Says Paul. But rejoice in the spectacular work.

That God is doing. Through his sermons of the gospel. Establishing firm faith in Christ. And reordered lives. And so.

A couple of things to finish. Number one. Let's not get too excited. About persuasive preachers. It is amazing isn't it. You could go home tonight. And you could listen to. John Piper.

[25 : 13] For evening supper. You could go to bed. To the sound of John MacArthur. You could. You could listen to. Tim Callow. Breakfast in the morning. You could listen to. Remarkable. Remarkable. Preachers.

And we want to give thanks. For their gifts. Don't we? I am not sure. You would want to download. The Apostle Paul's sermons. I just. See from what he says. In 2 Corinthians 3. I don't think we'd ask him. To speak at conferences. I doubt whether we'd want him. To come to the church weekend. Or were he? Because. He's an unimpressive preacher. And many preachers. Are unimpressive. And yet God. Is using. And has used.

Unimpressive preachers. And their struggles. For our sake. Their prayers. For us. And their proclamation. Of Christ. Should be important to us. So what about.

[26 : 07] Listen to the sermons. As you jog. Or as you go to sleep. Does the way. In which. God. Is actually working. As Paul explains it here. Have anything to say.

To my concerns. How about. You listening to sermons. While you jog. Well. Let me say this. I don't think it's wrong. At all. For you to listen to sermons.

When you jog. At all. Or to go to sleep to them. If that's what you want to do. But listen to this. Do not neglect. The deep purpose. Of God. In the giving of his word. What our sermons.

Is meant to do. They are not meant. To give you a buzz. They are not meant. To entertain you.

They are not meant. To amuse you. They are not even. Meant to excite you. As rhetoric.

And rhetoric. Certainly can do that. Can't they? But they are. Can you see from this passage. To encourage your hearts. To knit us. As a church family. Together. In love.

[27 : 04] And to give us. The full wealth. Of conviction. That understanding brings. So that we will not be deceived. But we are presented before him.

Holy and spotless. And believe in us. And above reproach. Let's pray. Heavenly Father.