

## BE ENCOURAGED!

Colossians 2: 1-10

The Christian life is a life to be enjoyed to the fullest. Now, do not be mistaken. When you live your life in the center of God's will there will be heartaches involved, many more than just the normal heartaches of life. Jesus was a man of sorrows, a man acquainted with grief (Is. 53:3). And yet the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was a man who was anointed with the oil of gladness above His companions (1:9). Jesus had more joy in His soul than any man who has ever lived. But He said to His disciples the night before He died, "These things have I spoken unto you, that you might have My joy in yourselves, and that your joy might be full (John 15:11). Can you imagine that? Jesus seeks to give us His very own joy, that our joy might be the fullest joy that is possible.

But beloved, just as surely as Jesus is the joy giver, Satan is the joy killer. Jesus says that Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy (Jn. 10:10). And that was exactly what he was trying to do in the Colossian church. He had crept into the church as a thief through those who were espousing a false teaching. It was the insipient form of a heresy called Gnosticism, which flourished in the first four centuries.

If I could describe Gnosticism to you in just one sentence, this is what it would be: "Christ is not enough". Gnostics believed that Jesus was not God in the flesh, that His salvation was not sufficient, and that they alone had the knowledge that led to true salvation and purpose in life. Gnostics believed that there was a great chasm between your sinful body and your soul, and that if your soul was right with God you could sin to the max your body, for it was naturally evil anyway. Others took the other extreme,

living lives of asceticism, robbing them of any pleasure at all, whipping their bodies into subjection to their manmade laws. The Gnostics were kind of like the Pharisees, an elitist group that you had to look to be your spiritual mentors if you ever hoped to attain unto eternal life. And Satan was using the Gnostics to wreak havoc in the church. Some, if not many of the Colossians had lost the assurance of their salvation. They were living in defeat to legalism and sin day by day. They were discouraged. And so Paul writes the Colossians to address the problem.

So some might ask the question, “So what’s the use of studying about the Gnostics of today? After all, this is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not the 1st century”. Well, because Gnosticism never died, that’s why. In every century since the cross the devil has perpetrated the lie that Christ is not enough. And all he has done in the 21st century has been to package the old Gnosticism in new packaging. And the result is that many Christians today are just like the Colossians. They are unsure of their standing in Christ and they remain in a state of defeat. Other Christians live in a state of sin. Just this week our state Baptist paper had a feature article about the common practice that our culture calls cohabitation and which God calls adultery. But if you asked many who are living in adultery if they were a Christian they would say, “Sure.” Well, some may be, but some are not. But adultery is just the tip of the iceberg. Compromising Christianity is the order of the day. And as a result Christians are living in defeat and discouragement, the church has lost her respect in the eyes of the world and is floundering, and lost people remain lost. All because our generation has bought in to the ancient heresy that Christ is not enough.

Do you need encouragement today? Well, let me say that there is not a one of us that doesn’t need encouragement from time to time. God told Moses in Deut. 1:38 to encourage Joshua

as he was about to take up the mantle of leadership with God's people. 2 Chron. 35:2 says that King Josiah appointed priests and then encouraged them in the work of the Lord. Even Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him into the inner recesses of the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed because He needed encouragement. When Paul and Barnabas visited the synagogue at Antioch the rulers of the synagogue said to them, "If you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it" (Acts 13: 15). Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up.." (1 Thess. 5:11). Beloved, every one of needs encouragement.

But you may be in special need of encouragement today. Do you live in constant doubt about your salvation? Do you live in defeat because the circumstances of life suck all the joy out of you? Are you seeking your joy from things other than Jesus but always coming up empty? Well there's probably at least a few of you, if you were totally honest with yourself, you just answered "Yes!" on at least one of those questions. You came to church discouraged this morning. Perhaps you almost didn't come because you are discouraged and just didn't feel like putting on your happy mask for two hours. Well, today I want you hear and believe God's declaration that Jesus Christ is enough for you, enough for your salvation, or enough for your sanctification, enough for everything you will ever need.

Turn in your Bibles, please to Colossians 2: 1-10. Paul had never visited the Colossians, yet he still had a burden for them. He knew that they were discouraged and he wanted them to be encouraged. So in chapter 2 he sets out to encourage them, and in verse 2 he shares about the two ways in which God encourages His people. First, Paul said, I desire that your hearts be knit together in love. That is, he desired that the Colossians be a

close knit, loving church, for that is a major way that we find encouragement.

Now, the words “knit together” means “to make to come together”. And Paul said that our hearts are encouraged as a church when we come together. But we must do more than just come and sit together in church in a worship service. Paul said that we are to come together in love. And that is coming together not in a spirit of politeness, nor even friendliness. A lot of us are good at being polite and friendly. But it means to come together in a spirit of genuine concern, and a spirit of true service. We must come together with the spirit that Paul talks about in Phil. 2:4 when he says “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others”.

Beloved, let me say to you that this is what real love does. Real love really cares. Real love looks out for the interests of others, for ways to encourage, to build up and not tear down. Now, of course, Jesus was the best encourager ever. The first thing that Jesus ever said to Nathaniel was, “Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no deceit”. The first thing that He ever said to Peter was, “You are Simon, son of Jonah. You shall be called a rock”. Jesus was always building people up and not tearing them down. Certainly He called sin, sin, but He was always being an encourager, in word and in deed. And this is what so many so desperately need. For someone to build them up and encourage them.

Now, how can we do this as the body of Christ? Well, may we just get really practical for a few minutes? When you are at church you can start by just wearing your name tag if you have one. And if you don't have one tell us and we'll get you one. What does this do? It encourages someone who is a newer member and who doesn't know you to connect with you by making it easier. And that means a lot to someone in new surroundings.

It says to them, “He or she cares about me enough to let me know who they are”. But there’s something else you can do. You can slow down enough to give someone a sincere greeting and then be a good listener if they want to talk. So many of us are in a rush all the time, even at church. And I’m as guilty as anyone. Now, many of us do have responsibilities on Sundays that we must fulfill. But we can still pause to give people our full attention for a few moments and let them know we care, and if the conversation must be cut short we can always say, “Let’s talk some more after church”. But you can’t encourage someone unless you spend time with them.

Next week we are going to have a fellowship dinner after church. You can be an encourager by staying and having fellowship with your brothers and sisters. When you go through the line to get your plate you can encourage Marty and the youth by telling them how much you appreciate them. You can encourage someone who is eating alone by sitting down beside them. If you were blessed by the choir and you see a choir member or Bro. Jerry you could say, “Keep up the good work for Jesus. You were a blessing to me today.” But the key to all of this is the one little word “love”. For it is love that fuels obedience to the entire law of God. Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, your soul, and your mind.....and....you shall love your neighbor as yourself. One these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”. Mark it down, beloved. Underline it. Circle it in red. If you are loving God with all of your heart, it will spill over to loving your neighbor, and especially your brother and sister in Christ. And you’ll love them in word and in deed.

There is a second way that God encourages His people that we see in verse 2; “That their hearts may be encouraged, being

knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ.” I like the ESV translation of verse 2: “that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ.” Paul says that great encouragement that come from understanding and knowing God’s mystery, which is Christ.

Now, the NT speaks of numerous mysteries, and it calls them all mysteries. And a mystery in the New Testament is not some puzzling phenomenon that has no explanation at all. But it is a hidden truth which God has made known to His children (1 Cor. 2: 6-8). One such NT mystery that Jesus spoke of is the kingdom of God. Another is the Rapture, another is the relationship of Christ to His church, another is the mystery of godliness, another is the mystery of the spirit of the Antichrist, and another is mystery of the seven churches in the book of Revelation. But none is greater than the mystery in verse 2, God’s mystery, which is Christ.

Let me explain to you what God’s mystery in Christ is all about. This vast, enormous mystery in Christ can be crystallized into one powerful verse in 2 Cor. 5. 2 Cor. 5: 19 says, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself”. That’s it in a nutshell. The God of glory descended from Heaven, entered the human race through the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, and made peace with sinful men by dying on the cross in their place, being raised from the dead, and ascending back into Heaven to live forevermore. What a glorious, magnificent mystery!

Now, beloved, please listen so very carefully, for here is where our encouragement comes from. Look again at verse 2. Do you see the words “full assurance”? They mean what they say. God wants every child of His to have full assurance, total peace that they belong to Him. He wants them, He wants **you** if

you are saved, to rest in the precious truth that He has you in His hands and that nothing can rob you of your home in Heaven. And your assurance comes in your **understanding** and **knowledge of God's mystery**. Now, we've already said that God's mystery is that He was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. But what Paul wants you to understand and know about this great mystery is, **Christ is all that you need!** The Gnostics were teaching that you needed much more than Christ to be saved. You needed the higher knowledge that only they could teach you.

Look at Paul's warning about them in verse 8. The word "cheat" means to plunder, to destroy. And Paul said that the Gnostics would destroy whoever believed in their philosophy. It was a deceitful philosophy; it was according to man's traditions, and according to the basic principles of the world. And write in your margin by "basic principles" the words "evil spirits", for that's what they were. They were evil, demonic spirits, because they were drawing the Colossians away from their hope in Christ alone.

I mentioned to you earlier that Gnosticism never really died. Let me give you a couple of examples. Just yesterday I was at my mom and dad's house, cleaning with my brothers and sister, going through tons of old memorabilia of my parents. And one of the things we found was a book that someone had given them that was written in 1907. And here it is. Power of Will, written by Dr. Frank Haddock. It is a part of a series of books called the Power-Book Library. Just listen for a moment as I read from the preface: (p. iv, v, & vi). Friends, this is exactly what Paul is talking about when he speaks of the philosophy and empty deception of the Gnostics. Did you hear the man glorify the study of his books, which contained his knowledge? But did you also hear him say that you had to have average intelligence or you would get no good out of them? I'm glad Jesus didn't reject those without average intelligence, aren't you?

But that was 1907. About a month or six weeks ago I was channel surfing one night and came across a vivacious, attractive young woman speaking to an enthralled audience. And though I don't remember the content of her seminar, and can tell you without a doubt she was not teaching the Bible. She did not say one word about Jesus. She was espousing a self-help philosophy that was guaranteed to make you a better person if you'd just follow it. And folks, let me tell you, she had them eating out of her hand. 21<sup>st</sup> century Gnosticism. Christ is not enough.

But look in verse 3 at Paul's response to the claim of the Gnostics (read). In Christ we have all wisdom and knowledge. We don't need Power of Will. We don't need the wisdom of the pretty young pop psychologist. All that we need is Jesus. Now look at verse 9-10. We've seen this truth several times in our study of Colossians so far. In Jesus all the fullness of Deity dwells. Jesus is God! And Paul says that Jesus is head over all rulers and authority. So when you are in Christ what more do you need? You are totally complete. He is all that you need for salvation. So trust Him!

So friend, if you know in the depth of your soul that you've come to Jesus as sincerely as you knew how, confessing your lostness without Him, acknowledging that He died for you and that He is your only hope of Heaven - if you know that you've come to Jesus with this attitude and you've cried out in faith alone asking Him to be your Savior and your Master, then beloved, God wants you to know that Jesus is enough! He promised to save you if you trusted Him alone. He said, "Most assuredly I say to you, He who believes in Me has everlasting life" (Jn. 6:47). And God says, "**Understand** that My Son is almighty to forgive and to save. **Know** this in your soul. He is all that you need"! Friends, when by God's grace you get ahold of this awesome truth, it will be great encouragement!

But we cannot close just yet. Some of you have perfect assurance of your salvation, but you still don't believe that Christ is enough. What do you mean preacher? I mean that in your daily life you are looking to other things than Jesus for your joy and your peace. You are looking to your spouse, you are looking to your children or grandchildren, you are looking to material things, and you are looking to activities that fill your life day by day. It has been rightly said that you reflect what's really important to you by how you spend your time and how you spend your money. And that is so right. And many Christians put their money in everything else but the work of the Lord. Or they give God their leftovers. They spend the vast majority of the time that's their own pursuing a myriad of things other than serving Christ. And in doing these things they are simply saying, "Jesus, You are not enough. If I'm going to be happy, other things must be first priority".

You may be here today going through a great trial. But you are not walking with Jesus in faith, trusting Him to meet your need. And you've just about dropped out of serving Him faithfully. Beloved, Jesus is enough! Trust Him! Get back in the race! You are complete in Him. Whoever you are, whatever your need, you are complete **in Christ alone**.