

## EXPRESSING THE TRUTH

Colossians 1:21-2:7

There is a BBC comedy series that is aired on PBS entitled *Keeping Up Appearances*. It is about a group of people who work in an upscale department store in England and the program ridicules the extent to which many people go to express themselves and who they are by what they wear, how they behave, what they say, whom they associate with, and any number of other things that communicate something about themselves. There used to be a lot more concern about these kinds of things in our country. Many companies had “dress codes” which were strictly enforced. In society, in general, there were unwritten expectations of what was appropriate to wear to church or to the beach or to school.

All of us are influenced to some extent by consideration of the question “What does this say about me, if I do or say a particular thing?” The “image” we project can be an embellishment of the truth, it can be a muted expression of the truth (Sam Walton drove a pickup truck), or it could be an accurate or reasonable representation of the truth. We could argue that it doesn’t really matter, but I’m not sure that is a valid conclusion because we do have influence on other people. Admittedly, many of the areas of concern are of minor importance; however, there are eternal life issues that should be of major concern to all of us who know the truth of the gospel message. We may be the only expression of this truth to our neighbor or to a coworker or to a family member. Perhaps we can learn how to properly express this truth by demonstrating a continuing trust in Christ, by serving Him in His strength, by being faithful in spite of problems, and by continuing to grow in our commitment to God.

### Unending Trust in Him - 1:21-23

<sup>21</sup> And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—<sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. Colossians 1:21-23 (NASB95)

In the previous part of this letter, Paul had written about the ultimate outcome of God’s plan of salvation in bringing all things together in Christ. We noted that the purpose of the “fullness of the Godhead being in Christ” was for the completion of His mission and that was to reconcile all things to Himself. The Greek word translated “reconcile” literally means “to be thoroughly changed.” We see that Jesus made peace through His blood. This peace was a result of His paying the debt caused by our sin and this opened up the way for us to be restored to fellowship with God. Once this fellowship was restored, then the business of reconciliation – thoroughly changing everything – could take place.

In this part of the letter, Paul now moves from the global or universal reconciliation of all things to the specific or individual reconciliation of persons who have put their trust in His completed work on the cross. The importance of expressing the truth of this reconciliation to the world around us can be better understood if we will simply remember what life was like before we came to know the Lord and experienced His salvation. Paul used the term “alienated” to describe what was going on in our minds regarding our relationship with God. This gives us the idea of being separated because of not being familiar with something. We grow up in a world that imprints us in a particular way that is akin to “the survival of the fittest.” It is a world that teaches a “dog-eat-dog” and competitiveness as a way to operate. We are primarily influenced by the physical and emotional aspects of life and “spiritual” reality seems strange and

unfamiliar. A natural reaction to the “strange and unfamiliar” is that we see it as a threat and it produces hostility or resistance to embracing the unknown.

Because our thinking is faulty, then our behavior will be influenced by the faulty thinking. Our actions begin with thoughts and these actions will be in alignment with what we believe to be the truth. If we think that “winning at whatever the cost” is the proper attitude, then our behavior will be different from that which results from embracing the idea that “it is not whether you win or lose but how you play the game.”

The opposite of being “alienated and hostile” is being reconciled. Just as we were separated from God and did not have peace, even so the world without Jesus is separated from God and lacks peace. Jesus brought about this reconciliation by his death in which He took our sins upon Himself. He died to bear the penalty of sin (the wages of sin is death) so that we could be reconciled to Himself. The alienation and hostility resulted in “wrong behavior.” In the same way, being in a proper relationship with God (that is, being righteous) results in being holy and blameless in His sight and the behavior we express is evidence of this proper relationship. We participated in this blessing by faith and we will continue therein by faith. Our faith is neither in our own righteousness nor works but in the completed work of Jesus by which we are qualified to look forward in hope of spending eternity united with Christ Jesus our Lord. If we haven't acknowledged Him as Lord in this life, how can He be our Savior now and in eternity?

#### Serving Through His Power - 1:24-29

<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. <sup>25</sup> Of *this church* I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the *preaching of the word of God*, <sup>26</sup> *that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations*, but has now been manifested to His saints, <sup>27</sup> to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. <sup>28</sup> We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. Colossians 1:24-29 (NASB95)

In the previous verses, in writing about the means by which we are reconciled, Paul mentioned that Christ suffered in His physical body (resulting in His death) in order to pay the penalty for sin (the wages of sin is death). Recall that Jesus told His disciples in John 14 that He was “the way” to the Father. The implication is that we are to follow Him in “the way” that he showed us. Just as Jesus suffered in His physical body, we can expect to also suffer in our physical body if we are following the way that He showed us. [All Christians take part in these sufferings; it is through them that we enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22; 1 Thes. 3:3, 7). Suffering with Christ is essential if we are to be glorified with him (Rom. 8:17). D. A. Carson]

Jesus suffered on the cross for our sakes and He completed what He came to do. There is nothing lacking in the work of the cross. What is the phrase “Christ's affliction” referring to if the work of the cross was complete? Recall what Paul heard from the Lord during the Damascus road experience: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Saul was persecuting Christians and we see that Christ identified Himself with the suffering they were going through. We could argue that the sufferings we endure for the cause of Christ are the “afflictions of Christ.”

The sufferings we go through are not only beneficial to us in that we are reckoning the strength of self to be dead, but this suffering can help others since the occasions that bring about the afflictions are related to bringing the gospel message to others and giving up “our rights” as a witness or example of loving our neighbor as ourselves. Paul knew he still lacked having accomplished the full job of reckoning himself dead in his own life. It is only in putting the influence of the flesh “off” (by taking up our cross daily) that the influence of Christ can do its

work in us. He, by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, takes us from being justified by his work on the cross through the process of sanctification and will ultimately bring us to the point of glorification with and in Him.

A mystery is a mystery only until it is revealed. At that point, the message becomes “obvious” so that anyone can understand it. Prior to the revelation of God as presented to us by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the gospel message **was** a mystery. Now we can see that everything God has for us is “in Christ,” and if Christ is in us, then we participate in the riches of His grace. It is by this means that “Christ in you is the hope of glory.”

In verses 28 and 29, we find some insight into what Paul considered to be his purpose in the ministry of proclaiming Christ. The goal is to produce “completeness” in each believer so that each one will be transformed into the image of Christ. The full realization of this transformation will be manifested in the judgment and the presentation of those who are saved will apparently be by those who were used of Christ to bring them to salvation. This is thought to be what Paul meant in 1Thessalonians 2:19 where he wrote “for what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye in the presence of our lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” The process by which this happens is that God works within us to produce a change and to motivate us to share the good news with others so that they can benefit from the work the Holy Spirit will do in them. Then they will proclaim Christ and admonish (teach) others. This is the principle that Paul so clearly stated in 2 Timothy 2:2. “and the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”

#### Having Confidence About Him - 2:1-3

<sup>1</sup> For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, <sup>2</sup> that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and *attaining* to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, *resulting* in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, *that is*, Christ *Himself*, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:1-3 (NASB95)

Paul realized we are in a spiritual battle and we need to support each other in spiritual warfare. This spiritual warfare was against false teachings that were in the churches in and around Colossae. Part of the error was related to the Greek idea that all things physical were evil and, therefore, Christ did not come in human flesh. We see a reference to this implied in Paul’s statement in verse 1:22 where he wrote “yet He has now reconciled you in His **fleshly body** through death.” There are still false teachings concerning the nature and person of Christ even today. The Jehovah Witnesses and the Latter Day Saints are two obvious examples of those with erroneous teachings about Jesus.

We need to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ whether we have met them or not. One of the weapons of the devil is discouragement and all of us in the army of God need to be encouraged and realize that we are united in Christ. He is the central focus of all of the universe. He is all and in all. If we misunderstand Who Christ is, then we will have a poor foundation upon which to build.

#### Growing Commitment to Him - 2:4-7

<sup>4</sup> I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument. <sup>5</sup> For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ. <sup>6</sup> Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk in Him, <sup>7</sup> having been firmly rooted *and now* being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, *and* overflowing with gratitude. Colossians 2:4-7 (NASB95)

Verse four reminds us that the starting point for all related to our salvation is the fact that

we are in Christ and He is all sufficient. Others will come along and assert we need something more than Jesus. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9, it is all of grace through faith and even that is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God and not of works, lest any man should boast.

We can all appreciate the need for organization (good discipline) in any group of people. Without definite responsibilities being assigned to specific persons, very little would ever get accomplished. Many people object to overly defined organization because they see that as rigidity; however, a properly organized group will have built-in flexibility.

More important than orderliness is the foundation or principle upon which an organization is based. The church at Colossae put their faith in the completed work of Jesus Christ. They were not depending on Christ **plus** something else to be acceptable to God. We need to be wary of any religious group that has any requirement beyond "Christ alone" as their basis for justification in God's sight.

Not only is Jesus necessary and sufficient for our justification, He is also necessary and sufficient for our growth and maturity. This applies as well to just living life on a daily basis. We initially received Christ by faith and it is by faith that we continue in our relationship with Him. People have a tendency to want to "work for" or earn their salvation. The Bible clearly teaches the error of this. Even after we have accepted Jesus, we find the old ways are still there and we think we must use our own strength to grow. We fail to keep in mind that it is God Who is working in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Our focus and aim must always be on Jesus. We want to have a solid foundation, but that foundation must be Jesus Himself. We want to grow, but we must grow in Him. We want to have more confidence, but that confidence must be in Him. That is what Paul meant by "rooted, built up and strengthened in the faith."