

April 5, 2020

# Wrestling for the Riches of Christ

Colossians 2:1-5

LTS: Proverbs 8:12-31

The wisest people in the world are those who discover and apply God's riches in Christ.

“You’ll never know what prayer is for until you know that life is war.” It’s been many years since I first heard John piper say those words, but they came back to me like a flood this week as I was preparing this message.

If you are Christian parent of a young man or woman who has recently left home for college or career, then you have probably learned something about praying with a wartime mentality. When you push your barely-adult child out of the nest, you understand that you are sending him/her into a world full of spiritual dangers. It doesn’t matter so much to you whether they dazzle the world with their academic success. You’re not worried about whether they earn a big promotion on the job. Rather, what keeps you up at night is a concern for whether they will come home with their faith fully intact.

This is a valid concern because your son or daughter may very well find themselves working or studying under people who would love to separate your child from the faith you worked so hard to instill in them.

Think for a moment about your relational world.

It’s probably safe to say that almost all of us know someone who went off to college with their faith intact but then abandoned it within the first 12 months.

Make no mistake. This is not a new phenomenon nor is it one that affects young people only. From the text of Scripture, we could demonstrate with ease that this problem finds its origin all the way back in the early days of the church. And Paul knew all too well what it was like to have personal friends turn their backs on Christ and his gospel. Men such as <sup>r</sup>Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Demus, just to name a few.

---

<sup>r</sup> 2 Tim. 2:17

Paul was always keenly aware of the spiritual dangers his churches would face after he planted them and left them alone in God's care. He knew that unbelieving family members of these new believers would consider it their duty to entice their Christian loved ones away from Christ.

This, beloved, I think, is a fair appraisal of the theme and focus of the passage before us. And I think you will sense that tone as we read the passage together. So, let's stand in honor of God's word and read the passage before us.

Read Col. 2:1-15

Paul's great concern in this passage is that the believers would persevere in the faith despite the influence of false teachers who were actively pawning their spiritual myths and lies under the guise of superior wisdom. We know this is Paul's concern because of what he wrote in chapter 2:4. He declares, "I say this in order that no one may delude (or entice) you with plausible (deceptive) arguments."

So, Paul knew the believers in Colossae were facing spiritual danger and he wanted to strengthen them and protect them against the enemy's advances. But how could Paul protect them? How would he equip the Colossians against the enemies of their souls? Well, there are two ways he would attempt to protect them. First, he would write this letter to warn them so they would become aware of the danger (if they weren't already aware). Second, he would pray. Indeed, the core of this passage is about how Paul prayed for them.

Now, you may be thinking, "I don't recall hearing anything about prayer in this passage." And that is an astute observation. But notice how Paul begins the text. He says, "I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you." The question, then, is How was Paul struggling on their behalf? Well, when you consider the fact that he was writing this letter from jail it easy to conclude that he was struggling in prayer. He was praying earnestly for them that their faith not fail.

What specifically were the objects of his prayers? I see three important things that Paul believed would protect them from the enemy of their souls.

I. Wrestling for the Unity of Love:

II. Wrestling for the Riches of Assurance:

III. Wrestling for the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge

## I. Paul Wrestled for the Unity of Love:

1. He says (1), “for I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you.” The word for struggle here means conflict or contention or fight. Sometimes it is used for a foot race. “Struggle” is an athletic term. It was the word you would typically hear among those who were competing in the games. This is the kind of wrestling Paul is engaged in. It involves anxious care and mental conflict in view of the dangers that the believers in Colossae were being exposed to.

2. Paul is wrestling in prayer for them. This is the same kind of wrestling that Paul was engaged in just a couple of verses previous where his concern was that one day he might be able to present every man complete in Christ. The last verse of the chapter says, “for this I toil, struggling with all his energy that powerfully works within me. Paul was serious about prayer. He understood what prayer was for because he believed that life is war.

3. Notice too, that the church and Colossae was not the only church he was concerned about. There were actually three churches in that region. In addition to Colossae there was also a church Laodicea and Hierapolis, the three cities in the Lycus Valley. So, Paul had a lot of people to pray for, many of whom he had never met.

4. I learned this week that there is a Latin saying that goes like this, *precor est laboro*” which means, “To pray is to work.” Now, I suspect that every Christian hearing my voice prays. You may pray for a few minutes in the morning. You might offer up a brief prayer for help in a difficult situation. But few of us pray in such a manner that could legitimately be called the “Work” of prayer, or “Wrestling” in prayer.” Apparently, this deficiency in prayer was true even of Jesus’s disciples. You will remember in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked his men, “What? Could you not watch and pray with me for one hour?” But Paul labored in prayer for the Colossians.

5. Now, notice how he prayed on their behalf. According to verse 2, he wrestled for the unity of love. Specifically, he says, “That their hearts may be encouraged (filled with courage, or strengthened) being knit together in love.”

6. The principle is, Where there is spirit-wrought unity welded together by agape love, there is strength, hence the need for the people being knit together in love.

A. You know, the most amazing thing about the church of Colossae was NOT that a group of religious people were gathering for worship and mutual edification. Rather, the truly amazing thing was that those who were gathering included both Jews and Gentiles and that they loved one another!

B. Paul understood that a group of people who were knit or welded together in agape love would serve as a powerful protection against the schemes of false teachers. God created us to love and be loved, and there is no greater love on earth than the love of two people who are mutually devoted to Christ.

C. Beloved, this is why it's so critical that when choosing a college for our kids we limit the choices to those that have a thriving biblical church where the goal of their instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Who would ever want to leave such a community?

7. So Paul wrestled for the Unity of Love. That is, he prayed earnestly that the members of the church would be bound to one another in mutual love for Christ and for one another. Second, Paul

## II. Wrestled for the Riches of Assurance:

1. Let's pick up at the end 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."

2. In this community of Bible-saturated love (which is a description of a healthy local church), Christians are able to reach (apprehend) all the spiritual riches that are only discoverable in Christ. The term "full assurance" means complete certainty. And notice that he calls it the riches of Complete certainty. Paul is speaking of spiritual wealth and treasure.

3. Another way of saying this is that Paul prayed God would grant them

**All the riches of certainty  
that understanding brings.**

4. Paul wants to impress upon us that certainty (assurance) about what the the Bible teaches comes NOT by trying to muster up faith in a vacuum. Not by merely accepting what your parents told you is true, but rather, but by apprehending a deep, rich understanding of these things for yourself. And that means, we should be serious about learning what the Bible actually teaches. And the most important thing the Bible teaches is (2) God's mystery which is Christ.

5. There is little spiritual protection in settling for a casual and shallow comprehension of the Person and work of Christ. Paul prays that you to gain all the riches of understanding that will fill your soul with absolute certainty about Jesus.

A. Our culture does not look with favor upon people who speak with certainty about the things of God.

B. It is considered uncouth and politically incorrect to express any kind of truth with any kind of certainty. Witness what happened to the “My Pillow” guy who, while standing at the presidential podium this week, mentioned that the Coronavirus Pandemic is God’s way of calling us back to God, back to the bible, and back to our families. He was absolutely vilified by members of the media for it!

C. Such people pretend to be wise and rich with truth, but they are absolutely bankrupt in the things that matter for eternity. Even a Child who knows and is growing in Christ is wiser than they.

6. BTW: “Mystery and “Knowledge” are not throw-away words. The false teachers were always enticing people by suggesting that believing in Christ is good, but they have access to even deeper knowledge – the “Mystery truth” that is hidden from everyone but those who are initiated into their cult. In response, Paul declares that the only spiritual knowledge worth receiving is the Full Knowledge of God’s Mystery and God’s mystery is Christ.

7. So, to guard and protect the saints at Colossae from the perils of false teaching Paul prays for the riches of Assurance (or certainty) that are available to anyone who would grow in their knowledge of Christ.

8. Thirdly, Paul...

### III. Wrestled for the Treasures of Wisdom

1. Paul writes: “Christ, In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

2. Sometimes when people bury a chest full of treasure, they do so to keep it protected and concealed. However, the treasures that are hidden in Christ are meant by God to be discovered and enjoyed.

3. Paul tells us that the treasures that are hidden in Jesus consist of wisdom and knowledge. And notice that it is NOT “some” wisdom and knowledge, or a taste of wisdom and knowledge, but “All the riches of wisdom and knowledge.

4. Before the incarnation when the word became flesh, God’s treasures of wisdom and knowledge were hidden. But when Christ came, they were unfolded to all who believe in Him. Just as he did for the Corinthians, so now to the Colossians Paul insists that Christ is the wisdom of God and in him we find true knowledge.

5. A.T. Robertson writes, “In Christ man is given the knowledge necessary to guide us in the way of life. Christ is able to instruct us in all that we need to know, so that it is Not necessary for us to apply to philosophy, or to the teaching of human beings.<sup>1</sup>

6.”All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” means,

- The mystery of why man exists,
- the meaning of life,
- our purpose for being
- our role in the world
- our personal identity
- Our relationship with God
- His plan of salvation
- what it means to be delivered from the evil one
- the believer’s resurrection,
- the purpose and unity of the church,
- who God is,
- His plan of redemption,
- his eternal attributes,
- His design for the nations and for every sentient being in the cosmos;
- All of it was hidden but now revealed IN Christ!

7. Whether anyone else in the world believes in this wisdom or not, they are there (in Christ) as every believer knows by fresh and repeated discovery<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A.T. Robertson, [Word Pictures in the New Testament](#) (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Col 2:3.

<sup>2</sup> A.T. Robertson, [Word Pictures in the New Testament](#) (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Col 2:3.

8. The fresh and repeated discovery of the wisdom and knowledge of Christ is what secures us and protects us from the smooth-talking, serpentine errorists who would separate you from your faith if they can.

9. So if there is a young barely-adult person who will soon be jumping (or getting pushed) out of the nest, now you know how to pray for the. And I hope you will wrestle in prayer for the good of their souls. And as you do you will remind yourself that...

The wisest people in the world are those who discover and apply God's riches in Christ