

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Paul's Conflict is Your Conflict" (Colossians 2:1)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/13/2010

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"I Want You to Know"

In the opening verse of Colossians chapter two, the Apostle Paul says this: "I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you..." What is this "great conflict"? Why is the Apostle Paul engaged in it? Why does he say to the Colossians, "I want you to *know* what a great conflict I have for you"?

In order to understand this, we need to go back a few verses, to chapter one, verse 27, where Paul speaks of "Christ in you, the hope of glory." "Him we preach," Paul says, "warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily. *For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you* and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, 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, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Paul says, "For I want you to know." "I want you to understand." What does he want them to understand? "What a great conflict I have for you." Literally, he is saying this: "I want you to understand how great an agonizing spiritual battle I engage in on account of you." In the original language he says "I have" this conflict. The word that he uses indicates that this conflict is something that is constantly with him. It is constantly a part of his life and ministry. It is something

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that never ceases. It's the same word that was used in that day to describe someone wearing a garment. I wear this conflict like a garment, Paul is saying. This spiritual conflict on your behalf is so much a part of my life, that it's like wearing a garment. It is always with me.

Paul's Spiritual Responsibility

Paul is saying to the Colossians, I want you to understand that I have a spiritual *responsibility* for you, and I want you to understand that this spiritual responsibility involves conflict. Paul is using forceful language here. The word that he uses for "conflict" in the original Greek is the basis of our English word "agony." I want you to know that I am agonizing over you, Paul is saying. It's the same word that he uses in chapter one, verse 29 when he says that he labors to the point of exhaustion in this ministry, striving – literally, agonizing – over it.

And how does he do that? Well, he's already spoken of it in chapter one, when he says in verse nine that he does not cease to pray for the Colossian believers. Furthermore, his prayer is a specific prayer. He says, I am praying "that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light" (1:9-12).

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And furthermore, at the end of chapter one, Paul says that this conflict involves constant effort on his part, "warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect (or mature) in Christ Jesus."

Here we have not only the nature of the conflict but also the goal of the conflict. The goal is that those for whom Paul has a spiritual responsibility may become mature through their knowledge of Jesus Christ and His Word. The goal is that they may be equipped to deal with all of the challenges of life in a sinful world. The goal is that they may understand how to think with the mind of Christ. The goal is that they may understand how to conduct themselves in a way that is worthy of Christ. The goal is that they might continually grow in this wisdom, day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, until the day when they are delivered from this present evil world and glorified to live in the presence of Christ forever.

What Paul is talking about here is the development of spiritual intelligence. God doesn't ask you to put your mind in mothballs when you become a Christian. He doesn't ask you to turn off your intellect. Far from it. God doesn't place a premium on ignorance.

Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ liberates Christians to use their minds in a way that the unbeliever can't even understand. God's Word, by the illumination of the indwelling Holy Spirit, equips believers to do that. Faith in Christ gives you access, as Paul puts it here in Colossians chapter two, to "all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the

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Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

It is God's Word that equips the Scripture-driven Christian, and the Scripture-driven church. God wants you to use your mind, driven by Scripture, illumined by the Holy Spirit, to live a godly and fruitful life for His glory. And God wants this for every Christian, not just some elite group. You don't have to have a Bible college or seminary degree to be a Scripture-driven Christian who is filled with the knowledge of God's will.

In the eyes of the world, Peter and the other apostles were uneducated and untrained men. But we read in Acts chapter four that as they preached and taught in the early days of the church, the Pharisees – the theologically educated men of the day, but men who were spiritually dead, men who didn't know how to think God's thoughts – those men marveled because these (as they thought) uneducated, untrained apostles could preach with such power and live with such boldness. Acts 4:13 tells us that they took note of the fact that these men, Peter and John and the rest, “had been with Jesus.”

The same was true of the Apostle Paul. By human standards, he was a highly educated man. He had once been a leader among the Pharisees. But he told the Galatian church, that means nothing. I'm not giving you my own wisdom, not my own understanding of things. I'm giving you the knowledge of the will of God that I received directly from Jesus Christ. I too have been with Jesus.

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That's what we need today. We need to develop spiritual intelligence. Not a puffed-up intellectualism. Not the kind of intellectualism that the Apostle Paul condemned when he spoke of people who were "ever learning, but never coming to the knowledge of the truth." You need to be with Jesus. And the way to be with Jesus, the way to have the mind of Christ, the way to know God's will, is to be in God's Word.

Paul's Conflict is *Your* Conflict

So this is the spiritual conflict in which Paul was engaged. He engaged in this spiritual conflict on behalf of the people for whom God had given him a spiritual responsibility – in this case, the churches at Colosse and Laodicea, and many other churches that he helped establish, and many individuals that he personally led to faith in Christ, or mentored and counseled in the faith.

But this conflict is not merely Paul's conflict 2,000 years ago. If you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, and God has given you a spiritual responsibility for anyone else, this is *your* conflict today. You need to be engaged in the same conflict today. In order to do that, you need to ask yourself five critical questions. Let me give you those five questions, and then we'll come back and consider each one:

First, you need to ask yourself: "For whom am I spiritually responsible? Is there anyone for whom God has given me a spiritual responsibility?"

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Second, you need to ask yourself: "Do I have this conflict for them? Am I engaging in this same kind of spiritual conflict that Paul spoke of, on their behalf?"

Third, you need to ask yourself: "Do I understand the nature of the conflict that this spiritual responsibility involves?"

Fourth, you need to ask yourself: "Do I understand why the conflict is so important? Do I understand what is at stake in this great conflict?"

And fifth, you need to ask yourself: "Do those for whom I am spiritually responsible *know* that I am engaged in this conflict on their behalf?" Paul told the Colossians, "I *want* you to know. It's important for you to know." Do those for whom you are spiritually responsible *know* that you are engaged in this conflict on their behalf?

So now, let's come back and consider each of these questions in turn.

For Whom Are You Spiritually Responsible?

First, you need to ask yourself: "For whom am I spiritually responsible?" If you are a Christian parent, you have a spiritual responsibility for your children. If you are a pastor, you have a spiritual responsibility for your congregation. If you are a Christian teacher – a Sunday school teacher, a Christian elementary or high school teacher, a Christian college or seminary professor – you have a spiritual responsibility for your students.

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Now this may sound obvious. But as I look at the state of our families today, as I look at the state of the church today, as I look at the state of much of Christian education today, I wonder if parents and pastors and educators are *really thinking* in terms of the serious spiritual responsibility you have been given. You have been given a responsibility for *souls*. So the first question you need to ask, and honestly answer, is, "For whom am I spiritually responsible?"

Do You "Have" This Conflict For Them?

Secondly, you need to ask yourself: "Do I have this conflict for them?" Do you think about your responsibility in terms of conflict, of a continual striving? Your responsibility as a parent for your children? Your responsibility as a pastor for your congregation? Your responsibility as a Christian educator for your students? Paul had to deal with some difficult issues in the Corinthian church, but when he wrote his first letter to them he said, "I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you...for in Christ I have begotten you through the Gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me" (1Corinthians 4:14, 16).

Are you engaged in the great conflict in such a way that you can say that to the ones for whom you are spiritually responsible – "Imitate me"? The Apostle John wrote this to those for whom he was spiritually responsible: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth" (3rd John 4). Can you say this to those for whom you are spiritual responsible? Do you have this conflict for them?

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Is it so much a part of your life that you wear it like a garment, as Paul did? Do you rejoice when you see growth and the development of maturity in Christ?

Do You Understand the Nature of the Conflict?

Thirdly, you need to ask yourself: "Do I understand the nature of the conflict that this spiritual responsibility involves?" You need to understand that the essence of this conflict is that it is a spiritual conflict. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood," Paul says in Ephesians chapter six, verse twelve, "but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

The nature of the conflict is that it involves fervent prayer, as Paul tells the Colossians in chapter one. The nature of the conflict is that it involves warning and teaching, as he tells the Colossians and the Corinthians. And the nature of the conflict is that it involves a clear goal, as we read at the beginning of Colossians chapter two. That goal is unity in the knowledge of the truth, and, as a result, maturity in Christ Jesus. Helping those for whom you are spiritually responsible to become equipped with the whole armor of God, as Paul tells us in Ephesians six, that they may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil, the schemes and trickery of the Devil. So you need to ask yourself, "Do I understand the nature of the conflict that this spiritual responsibility involves?" You need to understand that it is a spiritual conflict. It is a struggle against Satan on behalf of others.

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Do You Understand What's At Stake?

Fourth, you need to ask yourself: "Do I understand why the conflict is vital? Do I understand what is at stake in this conflict?" The conflict is vital because the believer is up against strong and serious opposition in the world. We're not just up against unsaved human beings. We're not just up against this fallen world-system. We're up against the one who is behind it – Satan himself.

The conflict is vital because the current generation of Christian adults is at stake. Satan is looking for every opportunity to undermine and overthrow families by attacking Christian parents. Satan is looking for every opportunity to undermine and overthrow local churches by subverting their pastors. Satan is looking for every opportunity to undermine and overthrow Christian high schools and colleges and seminaries by sowing the seeds of doctrinal deviancy, and apathy about eradicating false teaching, in the hearts and minds of Christian educators.

And the conflict is vital because the next generation of young people is at stake. Satan is looking for every opportunity to knock our young people off their feet, spiritually speaking. Satan is looking for every opportunity to implant doubts about the reality of the Christian faith in their minds.

The conflict is vital for Christian parents because it means the difference between spiritual life and spiritual death for their children. The conflict is vital because it means the difference between a life lived for things that are going to be burned up –

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“wood, hay, and stubble” Paul calls it – and a life lived for God’s glory – “gold, silver, and precious stones” he calls it, things that matter for eternity.

The conflict is vital for pastors because it means the difference between spiritual life and spiritual death for the church. The conflict is vital because it means the difference between a church that is on fire for Jesus Christ, and accomplishing His purposes for the church, and a church that is occupied with all kinds of things that don’t matter, a church that is an utter failure in the eyes of Christ.

The conflict is vital for Christian educators because it means the difference between Christian schools and colleges and seminaries that are training young people in authentic Biblical Christianity, and schools that are giving them a subtle and deceptive counterfeit – and sending them out into the world to infect the next generation with that same counterfeit, and even worse ones.

So you need to ask yourself, as it relates to the people for whom God has given you spiritual responsibility, “Do I understand why the conflict is vital? Do I understand what is at stake in this conflict?”

Do They Know?

That brings us to our fifth and final question. You need to ask yourself: “Do those for whom I am spiritually responsible know that I am engaged in this conflict on their behalf?” Paul said, “I want you to know.” Let them know it. Don’t hide it. Don’t be ashamed of it. Don’t think it’s unimportant. Make sure they know. Make

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sure they know by your words. Make sure they know by your deeds – by your example. Can you say to those for whom you are spiritually responsible, as Paul said to the Corinthians, "I urge you to imitate me?" Is your engagement in this great conflict worthy of imitation? If you are truly, vitally engaged in spiritual conflict on behalf of your children, your congregation, your students, then let that knowledge – that fact that you are investing in them by engaging in spiritual conflict on their behalf, fervently and specifically praying for them, warning them about spiritual pitfalls, teaching them the truth that is in Christ – the knowledge that you are doing that will be a convicting knowledge for them.

An Invitation

So, dear Christian, let me invite you and encourage you to take stock of these things in your own life today.

I encourage you to really get hold of the fact that you have a spiritual responsibility for those whom God has placed in your care – in your home, in your church, in the classroom, wherever it may be.

I encourage you to really understand the nature of your responsibility, that this is a conflict – a spiritual conflict against the forces of Satan himself.

I encourage you to get a fresh vision, a fresh understanding of why this conflict is vital. A fresh vision and a fresh understanding of what is at stake in your home, your church, your school.

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I encourage you, by the grace of God and by the enabling of the Holy Spirit, to seek to get the fire of that conflict inside of you, to engage in it without fail, to do it with a deep love for those God has placed under your care, and to make sure they know that you are engaged in that conflict on their behalf, and to make sure they see that you are engaged in that conflict on their behalf. Paul said, and you need to say, "I have this conflict." This is *your* conflict.

If you do these things, you'll be able, as Paul says in Ephesians 6:13, "to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." And those for whom you have engaged in this conflict will also be equipped "to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." You'll be able to say, with the Apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight." And there again, it's that same Greek word for conflict. You'll be able to say to the next generation, as Paul said to Timothy, Do as I did – "Fight the good fight of faith" – and there yet again, it's that same word for conflict. Paul said this to Timothy, and today as Christ's minister I say it to you:

"But you, O man of God, flee [the things of this sinful world] and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord

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Jesus Christ's appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords...to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen." (1 Timothy 6:11-16)

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