

COLOSSIANS 2:1-8 | WALKING IN THE MYSTERY

VERSE 1 – BLUE

Paul's "pastoral heart" caused him **great conflict** for the Colossians, along with neighboring **Laodicea** but also for **as many as have not seen my face in the flesh**. This, it seems, would make the passage directly applicable to all of us in the Body of Christ, followers of Paul yet never having met him personally.

The **conflict** is not an external battle, but rather an internal agony expressing the deep-seated desire of Paul's heart, which is to be stated in the verses that follow.

VERSE 2 – BLUE

Paul's desire for his followers is stated succinctly in this verse. The desire is singular, the road to fulfillment is twofold.

The singular desire, **that their hearts might be comforted**. The word **comforted** is from the Greek παρακαλέω [parakaleo], which would include comfort, encouragement, instruction, exhortation, etc. In fact, no greater comfort can be found for a Christian than in the twofold path outlined in this verse.

The first road toward comforted hearts is that the believers would be **knit together in love**. The verb is in the passive and cannot be created, but rather "happens" when the believers embark on the same journey. The Greek συμβιβάζω [sumbibazo] is literally, "together embark." One of the great comforts of the Christian life is found when believers discover a church family in which all their fellow believers have embarked on the same journey. It happens passively (that is, naturally) when believers are on the same journey and do so **in love**. All attempts to "force the knitting" will fail when the believers are not on the same journey.

The second road toward comforted hearts is that this journey is **unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God**. That is a mouthful, but also essential to comforted hearts. As Pauline believers, we should be moving toward a richness of **assurance of understanding** that is built upon **the mystery of God**. Most in the Christian faith do not even know there is a **mystery of God** now revealed in Paul (see 1:27), let alone find any assurance from it. Yet those who have discovered it have more comfort, more love, more assurance than ever before. And the best news: this knowledge does not require some secret formula or spiritually infused understanding! It only requires reading the Scriptures literally, including 2 Timothy 2:15.

A note on the phrase **of God, and of the Father, and of Christ**. The interpretive question is whether this is a reference to three (God, the Father, Christ), or of two (God the Father, Christ)? Any ambiguity is removed using what is called the *Granville Sharp Rule* or simply *Sharp's Rule #1*. In short, this rule is that if the definite article is repeated in the second in a list, then the two things are different things, but if not repeated, then the two things are the same thing. Young's Literal Translation or a Greek interlinear is a great place for an English student to be able to see the Greek articles. In this case, YLT translates as "...secret of the God and Father, and of the Christ." According to the rule, therefore, God and Father are one, and Christ is a second.

Note that the modern versions make *Christ* to be the mystery. For example, the ESV reads, "to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ". This is due to a textual variant adopted by the Critical Text. It is theologically inept since Christ (the anointed one) was revealed at least from Genesis 3 and was no mystery. This is one of hundreds of reasons to avoid the modern translations.

VERSE 3 – BLUE

It is difficult to know whether the **whom** is a reference to God (with Christ then being a parenthetical in verse 2), or to Christ, who is the antecedent with the closest proximity. Neither choice would lead to theological error, but it seems that God the Father is the one holding **all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**.

VERSE 4 – BLUE

Without **the acknowledgement of the mystery of God** (v. 2) it is easy to be beguiled with **enticing words**. There is nothing as strong as knowledge to overcome **enticing words**, and nothing stronger than the full knowledge of the mystery to overcome the **enticing words** of the mixed-up world of Christianity.

VERSE 5 – BLUE

Paul's comment about **absent in the flesh** was surely a reference to his physical location. However, Paul chose words very close to 2 Corinthians 5:8, when he was speaking about death, using the words **absent from the body**. Today, Paul is **absent from the body** and thus not with us in the flesh, but still with us **in the spirit**.

Paul cared about their **order**, using the word τάξις [taxis], from which we get *taxonomy*, the rules about the division of species. In this sense, we could interpret Paul's words as saying that he is "watching over your right division."

Paul also cared about **the steadfastness of your faith in Christ**. The word **steadfastness** is from στερέωμα [stereoma], from which we get *stereo*, with the idea of *fullness* and *fidelity*.

VERSE 6 – BLUE

The verb **received** is an *active* verb. This is problematic for the Calvinist position which says a person receives Christ Jesus before they have any recognition of Him. This is a necessary corollary to their understanding of Total Depravity. See also 1 Cor. 15:1, Gal. 1:9, Phil. 4:9, and John 1:12 for other examples of "active receiving." For an example of the same word used in the passive, see Matthew 24:40.

The verb has an important adverb: **AS**. How did we receive Christ? We must walk in Him in the same manner. Since we received Him under the premise of Ephesians 2:8-9, in the same way we **walk...in him**. That is, our walk is one of grace and faith rather than a list of commandments and ordinances.

Concerning the phrase **Christ Jesus**. It is used 58 times, first in Acts 19:4. Bullinger says that this word order "denotes the now exalted One, Who once humbled Himself." (*The Companion Bible, Appendix 98. XII.*)

VERSE 7 – BLUE

Grammatically, there are four participial descriptions of those who have **received Christ** (v. 6) and are walking with Him. The first three are passive, the last is active.

The first three grew out of what they had **been taught**. Good teaching (when well received) will help someone to be **rooted and built up...and stablished in the faith**.

The last, in the active tense, is **abounding therein with thanksgiving**. The word **therein** is in the plural, and aligns with **taught**, also in the plural (abound in the teachings). I am convinced that the best way to grow in Christ is to become a student of the Word.

VERSE 8 – BLUE

One needs to **beware** lest they become **spoil** (in the sense of a trophy of war). Such "spoilage" would come through three weapons:

- **Philosophy**, which is always used negatively in the New Testament
- **Vain deceit**, a cheaper way to make someone **spoil**, but only works on the ignorant
- The **tradition of men** even if those traditions are church/denomination based. The church has been slow to reject tradition that is based on **philosophy and vain deceit** rather than the Scripture. The Roman Catholic church even goes so far as to raise tradition to the level of Scripture.

How much of our belief system has been developed **after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ?**