

ROMANCING THE SAINTS AT COLOSSAE

Studies in the Book of Colossians

*“If Ephesians can be labeled the epistle portraying the ‘church of Christ,’
then Colossians must surely be labeled ‘the Christ of the church’”
unknown*

Text

Colossians 2:1-8

Topic

Paul wears his heart on his sleeve and shows us
what the heart of a Christian looks like out in the world

Title

“Saved Heart”

Introduction

The apostle Paul wore his heart on his sleeve. He was never afraid to share his emotions and feelings. Author F.F. Bruce calls him the “apostle of the heart set free.”

In this next set of verses, in Colossians 2:1-7, we get a good look at Paul’s spiritual heart. We want to see it up close because it represents the kind of heart each of us can have as Christians who are serving the Lord.

Looking at Paul’s heart we will see two things that help develop and maintain a healthy heart:

1. The first will sound somewhat odd until we define it. It is in verse one where Paul said, “I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you...” Conflict with believers is important to your spiritual heart.
2. The second thing makes more immediate sense. In verses four and eight Paul said to have caution towards deceivers. That sounds good - except that it is becoming less acceptable for Christians to be cautious.

Any criticism is labelled 'divisive' and those who are analytical are deemed narrow-minded.

Conflict and caution were important to Paul. *That's good enough for me!*

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Conflict With Believers Will Help You Maintain A Healthy Heart, and #2 Caution With Deceivers Will Help You Maintain A Healthy Heart.

#1 Conflict With Believers
Will Help You Maintain A Healthy Heart
(v1-3 & 5-7)

"Conflict" is not what you think. It's not the petty arguing between Christians over the color of the carpet in the Sanctuary or other such nonsense. In fact, it's the opposite of that kind of thing.

The word "conflict" in verse one is the Greek word *agon*. The Greeks referred to the athletic arena as the *agon*. It was the place people assembled to watch the games. It came to refer to the contest itself.

The word is used six times by the writers of the New Testament under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

- Three of the times it is used it compares the Christian life to an athletic contest (First Timothy 6:12, Second Timothy 4:7, and Hebrews 12:1).
- The other three times it is used to describe conflicts that are engaged upon because of the Gospel (Philippians 1:30, Colossians 2:1, and First Thessalonians 2:2).

When Paul used the word in Colossians 2:1 it was in this second sense of the conflicts he was engaged upon because of, or for the sake of, the Gospel. But he doesn't use the word negatively. The kind of conflicts he was describing were of a good kind.

He was engaged in a "great conflict" for believers in the sense that he was in the arena of the Christian life exercising all of his spiritual, mental, and physical energy to serve others. Like a great athlete, he gave 110% all the

time, leaving it all on the field, bringing his 'A' game, as a servant of Jesus Christ.

These verses give us some of the characteristics of a spiritually healthy heart.

Colossians 2:1 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,

Paul was writing to believers he had most likely never seen. Before he advised them he wanted to reveal his heart to them. He was an apostle, with great spiritual authority. But his care and concern for them was not official so much as it was personal.

It sounds odd but we sometimes need to remind ourselves that the ministry is not official; it is personal. We're dealing with people first, then issues.

"Laodicea" was about eleven miles from Colossae. It seems this letter was for them, too. The church in Laodicea, sadly, is famous for Jesus telling us in the Revelation they had become "lukewarm" and were about to be vomited out of His mouth.

The world is a dangerous place for believers. Our pilgrimage homeward to Heaven is fraught with peril. We have, however, both guidance and companionship along the way in the form of God's Word, God's indwelling Spirit, and God's earthly people.

Colossians 2:2 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,

Warren Wiersbe uses four words to summarize this verse. The first is encouragement, because Paul wrote, "that their hearts may be encouraged..." Paul exerted all his spiritual, mental, and physical energies to encourage believers - whether he was present among them or away from them, whether he knew them or not.

“Encourage” is from the word that means *to come alongside*. It can also be roughly translated “with heart.” The idea is to always come alongside believers with the desire to strengthen their heart for the Lord.

The next word that summarizes this verse is endearment, because Paul said, “being knit together in love.” When you knit something you pull together the separate strands and unite them into something that has both beauty and purpose. Among believers we are to have unity as something beautiful and with great purpose. It is possible to do so because of the “love” that God has shown us and that we can therefore show towards each other.

Paul exerted all his spiritual, mental, and physical energies to love believers in the ways that most promoted unity. For example, in one place he said he’d give up eating meat if it was something that stumbled his weaker brothers or sisters who wondered if the meat had been part of a pagan sacrifice. In another place he called upon the church to discipline a sinning member for the good of the rest of the body.

Enrichment summarizes the phrase, “attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding.” Paul exerted all his energies toward getting believers to understand the implications of the Gospel. The more they understood God’s Word, the greater their “assurance.” Assurance of what? **Of everything spiritual!** Assurance of their initial salvation; of their ongoing sanctification; and of their ultimate glorification in Heaven. Those assurances are “riches” indeed.

Finally, as for this verse, Paul’s heart was to see them enlightened, “to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ...” We’ve said before that a “mystery” in the Bible is something once hidden now revealed. We saw earlier in this letter that the “mystery” being revealed was the church of Jesus Christ as a new and amazing work of God that occurred after Israel officially rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Thus Paul exerted all his energies toward establishing and edifying local churches.

Colossians 2:3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Always keep in mind while reading this letter that the believers were under spiritual assault from deceivers. The deceivers were trying to convince them that they were, for one reason or another, falling short of the 'deeper' things of God. So occasionally Paul launches a spiritual missile against them. Here he reminds us that the Christian life is never a program or a philosophy. It is a Person. It is getting to know Jesus as a Person more-and-more every day. Yes, there are "hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge" to be discovered. But they cannot be discovered by programs or by philosophies of men. They are revealed by the Lord Himself as you spend time with Him. And they can be discovered by all believers - not just a privileged few.

Skip to verse five:

Colossians 2:5 For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

Part of Paul's "conflict," part of his being fully engaged as a servant in the arena of the Christian life, was to gather information about other believers and react to it with the proper spiritual response. That is what he meant when He said, "I am with you in spirit." He understood that we are all connected as the body of Jesus on the earth.

This is why it is so healthy to have contacts with Christian works in all parts of the world. It reduces the world so we can see God at work everywhere and, at the same time, it enlarges our hearts. We, too, are with those far-away believers "in spirit."

The church at Colossae was in "good order" with steadfast "faith in Christ." Paul could "rejoice." Other churches he wrote to were not in such great shape. He had different reactions to them - but always the proper spiritual response.

It can be challenging to respond properly, whether other believers are being blessed or are being disobedient. Our flesh gets in the way. A healthy heart reacts to the news then responds spiritually - no matter how hard it is on us or on others.

Colossians 2:6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,

Colossians 2:7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

All who are saved “received Christ Jesus the Lord” by faith. We are to continue by faith. How? Paul described what he meant using three metaphors.

The first is walking. In our modern era, walking has become somewhat obsolete. When we walk, we’re plugged-in to an iPod or are talking on our Bluetooth headsets or are otherwise occupied.

Pam and I have been walking almost every night for as long as we’ve been married. One thing we’ve noticed is that, no matter the season, fewer-and-fewer people go for a walk.

If people walked more, just for the sake of going for a walk to be together, this metaphor would be more powerful. Like the two disciples on the Emmaus Road, I think Jesus would reveal Himself more to us.

But whether you take walks or not, you can catch the understanding. You’re to have the sense that the Lord is with you every step of the day.

“Rooted... in Him” refers to a tree’s roots. Not the fruit; the roots. In the Book of Romans Paul describes Gentiles as being grafted into Jesus Christ as branches on a vine. The branches require the trunk, the roots, to live and to grow. We believe by faith that, having been grafted in, all the life we need will be provided by Jesus.

From agriculture Paul moved to architecture when he said, “built up in Him.” Again the emphasis is on the Lord, not us. We are being built up on Him as our foundation. It is an unshakeable, immovable foundation. As Habakkuk once said,

Habakkuk 3:17 Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls -

Habakkuk 3:18 Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Habakkuk 3:19 The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills.

Then Paul said, “established in the faith, as you have been taught.” It’s another missile launch upon the deceivers. There is something known as “the faith.” It is the teaching of the apostles and prophets who “established” the church by preaching and teaching in the first century, collected for us in the completed Bible. It needs no addition or subtraction.

The deceivers were telling the believers that Paul’s teachings were elementary, that they were a good place to start but that they understood deeper truths. Nope. Paul said, “as you’ve been taught.” It’s all there, in the Word, to discover.

Paul ended this section by telling them to be “abounding in it with thanksgiving.” Nothing exercises your spiritual heart for health quite like “thanksgiving.” You can always be thankful because you are rooted and built up in Jesus Who is walking with you every step of the way.

Thankfulness is like a spiritual pacemaker that keeps your heart beating properly.

Every believer is in the conflict, in the *agon*, in the arena. Too often, however, we think of ourselves as spectators rather than participants. We’re not watching the contest; we are the contestants! We are the athletes competing for the prize. Take a look at your life and ask the Lord to help you to exert more-and-more of your spiritual, mental, and physical energies towards serving Him in your particular arenas - at home, at work, in the world.

Paul also briefly mentioned deceivers.

#2 Caution With Deceivers Will Help You Maintain A Healthy Heart (v4 & 8)

We don’t need to spend a great deal of time today on the deceivers as they will be the topic of upcoming studies. We want to mention them in conjunction with our theme of maintaining heart-health.

Colossians 2:4 Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.

Caution is always required because there always are those wanting to “deceive” you. One of the means by which they deceive are “persuasive words.” It’s a phrase that can be translated *fast talk*.

I was a salesman so I understand that not all salesmen are evil. But many of them use fast talk to deceive you into their scheme. It might be their charisma or charm; it might be that they appeal to your greed or desire.

Here is a good rule: Never buy anything without thinking about it. When we helped Geno buy his first new car, he and I walked out of ten dealerships before we ultimately got the deal we wanted. We determined we were not going to buy anything the first time we walked on the lot.

In your Christian life you need this same attitude. Don’t automatically ‘buy-into’ what you hear. You must take what you hear back to God’s Word and measure it. Talk to men and women who are solid - but even then, be cautious. There is nothing wrong with a healthy skepticism. What men and women say about the Word of God is not the Word of God and needs to be tested.

Look at verse eight:

Colossians 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

The false teachers were peddling a fuller, deeper knowledge of spiritual things. Paul said they were in fact going to “cheat” the Colossians. “Cheat” is the word *spoil* used of plundering. Far from enhancing their relationship with Jesus, the deceivers would rob them of their spiritual wealth.

Paul began to identify the two types of deception at work in Colossae. The first was “philosophy and empty deceit.” Philosophy is simply the love of wisdom. It’s an OK word. We can even talk about a Christian philosophy, or Christian philosophers.

What Paul said in the original language was “the philosophy.” He was talking about a particular philosophy. He’ll discuss it later in chapter two. It has to do with adding human wisdom to the Word of God.

He gives an example in verse eighteen:

Colossians 2:18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

One interpretation of this is that the deceivers were telling you there was a greater spiritual “humility” in approaching God through intermediaries, like “angels,” rather than going to Him directly.

Today there are at least a billion people who do this by praying to dead saints who they believe have greater access to God than we who remain on the earth. It’s a terrible deception. Jesus died and now we have full and immediate access to God’s throne.

Then, in verse eight, Paul talked about “the tradition of men” and “the basic principles of the world.” Here he had in mind the things he will list in verses twenty through twenty-three. He had in mind religion with its rules, rites, rituals, and regulations, and the observances of diets and days that seemingly make you more spiritual.

The Sabbath is always a big issue. There are many Sabbath-keeping groups - not just Adventists. Even among mainline Christians there is a lot of talk about properly observing the Christian Sabbath.

Can I read something to you?

Colossians 2:16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,

Colossians 2:17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

You want to keep the Sabbath, great. But that’s between you and the Lord as a part of your relationship with Him. **You can’t project it on others.** Or any other day or diet.

Our point this morning is that lack of caution with regards to deceivers will contribute to heart disease. Just when you need your heart to be the strongest, when some trial comes along, you’ll be a cardiac cripple.

Jumanji and *Zathura*. No, I'm not speaking in tongues! They were movies in which the characters playing a game suddenly found themselves in a real adventure.

The Christian life is not a spectator sport. We are to be in the arena as contestants, as combatants.

Ask the Lord how you can get in the game.