

Text: Colossians 2:1-5

Title: Paul's Ministerial Concern

Truth: Protect yourself from deception by a loving connection to your church and a fully assured understanding of Christ.

Date/Location: Sunday September 20, 2015 at FBC

Introduction

In the immediately prior verses, we learned that Paul had a responsibility from God, a goal to fully minister the gospel among the Gentiles, and a struggle to accomplish that ministry in order to present each person complete as mature Christians before God. In the opening verses of chapter 2, he continues this thought.

The normal state of Christian ministry inside of itself *should* be harmony and love by which outsiders will know that we are followers of Christ. This is upset when believers walk in sin, do not love one another, and are not well instructed in their faith. Hopefully the problems are not always serious, but they can provide opportunity for the minister to be concerned.

On the other hand, the normal state of Christian ministry with respect to those on the outside is almost always one of labor and struggle. Progress for the gospel does not come easily in this world because of the sin nature of the people to whom it ministers; the opposition of demonic powers; the persecution of human leaders; and the propagation of false teaching by cultists. It should be no surprise that things can be difficult.

I. Paul's Concern for the Colossians and Others, verse 1

This "normal state of affairs" is why Paul had a conflict (struggle, contention) for the benefit of the believers.

A. Paul showed concern for three groups of people.

1. "For you" – the Colossians, the recipients of the letter.
2. "And those in Laodicea." Laodicea was a city within several miles of Hierapolis to the north and Colossae to the south and east (maybe like Dexter is to Ypsilanti in distance and orientation). All three cities were east of Ephesus and Miletus by about 120 miles. This city is mentioned in Scripture here, also in Colossians 4:13-16 (4 times), and in Revelation 1:11 and 3:14-22. Paul wrote a letter to Laodicea as well, and there was to be a "letter exchange" between the churches so they could hear what Paul wrote to the other believers. The letter to Laodicea is lost; we believe that it was not inspired by God, perhaps because it was largely duplicate of Colossians, or contained material duplicated elsewhere like in Ephesians, Philippians, or Romans.
3. Paul was concerned with believers he had never seen or met before. His statement at the end of v. 1 about "as many as have not seen my face in the flesh" refers to an even broader group of people that were alive at the time

of his ministry in new little churches throughout the region, including the two previous groups. I think it is legitimate to fit ourselves into this phrase and find a good amount of application from this passage on that basis. Paul was undoubtedly concerned for future believers as well as ones in his present.

B. Paul showed concern, period.

1. It is not automatic that every minister really cares for the people to whom he ministers. Some people don't care about anything; others care only for their own things (Philippians 2:21). A few care genuinely about others (like Timothy, Philippians 2:20). Paul carried this burden in prayer and in preaching and in writing.
2. Paul was deeply concerned for the believers. We will see why in a moment, but we can connect 1:28-29 with 2:1 and see they use the same kind of vocabulary (labor, striving, conflict).
3. Sometimes all you have to do is say the words, "Brother, I'm very concerned that..." and this alerts your brother that what you are saying is significant. I'm very concerned that:
 - i. You are missing a lot of church lately.
 - ii. You are not reading your Bible or praying very much on your own.
 - iii. You are doing worldly things in worldly places.
 - iv. You are afraid to speak about Christ to others.
 - v. Your priorities seem to leave God on the back burner sometimes or a lot of the time.

II. The Positive Direction of Paul's Concern, verse 2-3

It is good to be concerned, but if you just state the concern and walk away, there is little help and comfort in that. It might, in fact, just come across as a very critical spirit instead of an edifying and helpful spirit. How about coming alongside to help, suggesting what can be improved, how to address the concern, etc.?

Paul's burden for the believers had a positive direction too. It was that they themselves—in their hearts—would be:

- A. Encouraged. Not just a "feel good" kind of encouragement but the building in of courage, strength, comfort which come from the Christian faith.
- B. United and held together in love. Obviously this speaks against the negative idea of being fragmented, disunited, and torn by factions. The church as a body should be inter-connected with itself in love like pictured in Colossians 2:19 and Ephesians 4:16. An endless supply of circumstances provides opportunity for application of this principle.
- C. Fully comprehending the mystery of God—which is Christ.
 1. We discussed that mystery previously. It was hidden for ages and generations but has now been openly disclosed to the saints. Mainly, the mystery is that

Christ would dwell in the Gentiles. Salvation would not be limited to Jews alone, and instead of God dwelling in a temple made with hands, He now dwells in the human bodies of Christians throughout the world.

2. In Christ is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. If you comprehend that, you have everything necessary for life and godliness. You don't have to look to secret societies and cult religions to find more. The Colossians were in danger of being drawn away by other ideas, because they were lacking in the assurance of what they knew.
3. It is the full assurance of this message—understanding included—that provides a rich life and prevents you from desperately seeking for more. Here's the thing: you can know Christian truth, but when it comes right down to it, are you assured of it?

Has the message of the gospel come to you not only in words, but also in power and full assurance (1 Thess. 1:5)? Do you have the full assurance of hope in Christ (Heb. 6:11)? Do you have full assurance of faith (Heb. 10:22) or are you full of doubts? Do you really believe Christ existed, died, rose again, and ascended to Heaven? Do you really believe that trusting in Him you will be saved?

You can be wealthy in the world's riches, but completely destitute of the true riches of heavenly treasure.

I don't believe it is possible to fully comprehend this mystery of Jews and Gentiles together unless you are *in* it. You cannot appreciate the body of Christ fully unless you are a member of it and see it in action where there is no ethnic or racial distinction in the body, or status distinctions, or different levels of welcome for gender or various worker classes. It's not just a body of old people or college students—it is everyone!

III. The Reason for Paul's Concern, v. 4-5

Paul's "worry" for the church is two-fold.

A. False teachers. Paul's bottom-line purpose was to ensure that no one deceived the believers. The assumption, nay the certainty, is that there were deceivers out there trying to get people to doubt the sufficiency of Christ.

1. We see it today in all the cults. Why such effort to get people to doubt? Because the kingdom of darkness does not let its citizens emigrate very easily. It matters little whether its motivation is to keep them for its own pride, or to spite God and Christ, or to exercise power over them, or simply to destroy and kill more and more people.
2. Did your high school teachers and college professors plant seeds of doubt with smooth sounding words? Does moral pressure from the world, the consensus of evolutionary science, or the popularity of atheistic socialism draw your heart away from God? May I then say that I'm concerned for you? I am deeply concerned for you. I think you have been spending too much

time in the world and too little time with Christ and His Christians. I pray that you will be encouraged, built up in love, and be fully assured of the salvation of God in Christ.

3. Paul “wants them to know” and to remind them of the amazing mystery of the gospel and the church so that they will not be drawn away by false teachers. Many with ‘persuasive words’ – reasonable sounding, temperate, sort-of-nice words. False teachers don’t come along, usually, with crass, evil-sounding words. They come with words of intellect and compassion and concern and...many times doubts about God’s Word.
 4. They have everything—Christ in them, the hope of glory, and in Him there are all wisdom and knowledge. But other people were coming along and being derogatory toward Christ’s person and work.
- B. Paul’s absence. Paul is absent from them in body because of his imprisonment. Although this is the case, Paul feels a kinship with them “in spirit.”
1. He doesn’t mean anything weird like his spirit leaves his body and meets in their church services with them. He means as part of the body of Christ, connected to it as he is by the Spirit of God, he has solidarity with them.
 2. Solidarity in English is defined as “unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest; mutual support within a group.” It has a synonym of like-mindedness.¹
 3. Paul was an apostle. He and his message were foundational to the church. If you deleted Paul and the other apostles from history, we wouldn’t have a church—and thus the heavy attacks on the apostles in their ministry, causing many to die a martyr’s death. A pastor today is not “indispensable” in this same way. Sure, I would be concerned if I had to be absent from this body. Too many churches, when the opportunity for a new pastor comes, seize that as an opportunity to “be like all the nations around them” (Deut. 17:14, 1 Samuel 8:5, 2 Kings 17:15) and get a leader who will change everything so they can be like everyone else. That’s not a good idea if you want to honor Christ!
- C. As opposed to his two worries, Paul is very happy to see the church exhibiting two attributes:
1. Order. This word refers to an assigned arrangement, as in the order of priests (Luke 1:8), or Jesus as priest in the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6, and other verses). It refers to an orderly arrangement, a disciplined setup. The term is used of military formations.
 2. Steadfast faith in Christ. This is a firm commitment. They have taken a stand for the Lord, and they intend NOT to change in the least.

¹ Google’s define: operator, definitions provided by Oxford American College Dictionary.

3. Paul thereby indicates that he is not so fearful that he is shaking in his boots that the believers are about to depart *en masse* for a cult. But there is still in his heart a level of concern about it that burdens him to press on in the ministry of his stewardship to ensure that they are brought perfect before Christ instead of being led astray.

Conclusion

How does deception happen to a group of believers? Over time. With persuasive words. By lack of discernment. The new evangelical movement is an example. It questioned the need for separation from unbelievers and disobedient Christians. It encouraged greater academic and social involvement. It sounded good, until within a generation the movement collapsed on itself when it effectively denied inerrancy and partnered with all kinds of unbelieving groups. It had no way to separate from those errors because it had repudiated separation as a principle. To them, the evangel became almost unnecessary because they believed people who are Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Mormons, Catholics, and others are going to be in heaven too. These believers were not in good order, not steadfast in their faith in Christ. They were deceived by persuasive words and eventually gave up everything.

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