

SECTION 4 Through many dangers 1: Safety from deception

Colossians 2: 1-7

2:1 I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.

2: My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I tell you this so that no-one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.

5: For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

6: So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

What is the truth of the gospel; and where can you find that truth?

Whom do you believe when you are looking for someone who can direct you on the way to God? Whom can you trust?

There were many around in New Testament times who had a misunderstanding of the gospel. Some of these were deliberately seeking to benefit financially from their deviations; or to gain power over others. They would have their own version of the gospel and their own view of what Christians should be doing. In some ways it is still the same today, in that there are those - whether members of sects or just people expressing private views - who will manipulate the gospel for their own ends and purposes.

Aware of this danger, Paul endeavours to warn the Colossians and to teach them how to counter it. It entails being made aware:

1. that true knowledge rests in Christ, and only in Him;
2. that there is protection against deception; and
3. of the importance of a consistent walk in Christ.

Let's look at each of these in turn.

1. True Knowledge of Christ

The practical reality of an awareness of true knowledge being found in Christ comes in several ways.

a. By Spiritual Leadership

- There is a need for instruction - horizontal communication. He says: '*I want you to know*'. Many people in the church feel that they don't need to learn anything about the Christian faith, that they just have to claim allegiance and that is all. But that is not the case. We need to know and we need to have an

understanding of our faith. That is where instruction from spiritual leaders based on the Bible and its application comes in.

- There is the importance of prayer - vertical communication. What Paul is saying here is that we are engaged in a struggle, and a large part of that struggle is of a spiritual nature. That is where prayer comes in: it is seeking the help of Almighty God in this battle. We need to ask ourselves: Are we praying? Are we struggling and are we aware of engaging in such a spiritual struggle?
- There is the impartiality of witness - reflected communication. This is communication that is shared with others reflecting the awareness of vertical and horizontal modes. It is motivated by love and concern for others. This message to the Colossians was to be shared with the neighbouring Laodiceans, whom he hadn't even met.

b. Through Encouragement of a Loving Fellowship.

Sharing with others operates in the context of fellowship and partnership, together as fellow believers. We share a common faith, experience of salvation and motivation. It is a mutual aspiration in and through being, and being in, the church.

- The goal is encouragement of each other. Encouragement in what? Surely in promoting faith and in the fight against deviations and distractions. There is a real need to encourage each other within the church by reminding ourselves of, and in sharing, the precious aspects of our riches in Christ and the enabling that comes through our dependence on Him.
- The requirement is unified love. We need to be a family, not just to talk about it but rather to be a family and to have that closeness and that love and concern that characterises a good family. Love is what holds us together and allows us to be and to do what we are supposed to be and do.

c. In fostering Attainable Understanding

During this past week we have held a Holiday Club and have sought to teach the children, to lead them to an effective understanding of the Christian message and its teaching. What we have been trying to teach them is that the true treasure in life is Jesus. That is the same teaching and the same truth that is offered in all our services.

d. Through inculcating a True Knowledge of Jesus

Again we come back to a true understanding of the mystery of God. That mystery is Jesus; God is revealed in and through Him. It is all about Jesus. But it is more than intellectual knowledge for it is an acceptance of both the fact and the potential effect of really knowing God - that what He is in Jesus is so fully known to us that it becomes a part of the dynamic of our daily living.

2. Protection against Deception

Deception is both insidious and destructive: we need to be safeguarded against it and its effects. We need to be aware of several aspects if we are to be protected. For example :

a. Being alert to the danger of deception -

- We live in a world where there are all sorts of things that are not what they would pretend to be: plastic that looks like metal, flowers that are made of silk. In the same way there are deceptions of faith: things that appear to be what they are not, such as '*you can believe anything so long as you are sincere*' or that '*religions are all the same and all lead to God*.' That error must be confronted. 'It is deceptive.'
- It is easy to delude with plausible suggestions based on shallow arguments. The basis of our faith is the revelation that we have in Jesus, the truth that is in God's Word. It is not based on subjective, wishful thinking such as '*I (would like to) think that*, or the more plausible '*I believe*' without any reference to objective revelation. Our thinking must not become the victim of this world's compromising ways. We are constantly being asked to look at both sides, to give other arguments some credence, and to accommodate all views.

b. Being strong in the faith -

Deception is most effective when there is weakness, so a good defence is stability and integrity. This is a pastoral concern that the Colossians practise stability through the exercise of their faith and to experience the joy and strength that comes from that.

Protection against deception is not just a negative concept, concerned only with defence. The key is the exercise of faith in a positive way. Faith in Christ is confidence in, and dependence on, God's power through the work of Christ. There is the assurance of faith that sins are forgiven and that "*being justified by faith, we*

have peace with God". Faith lays hold of the power of the Gospel. Faith believes in the power of the resurrection and has confidence that "*Christ in you is the hope of glory!*"

3. Consistent walk of Faith in Christ -

The exercise of faith is seen in a consistent walk - and a child-like - walk of faith, from its beginning. It is characterised by:

- True repentance -. We need to go back to basic foundations: seeing the seriousness of sin, the bankruptcy of trusting self, the need for Christ; a desire for a changed life; and the simplicity of a child-like faith. This is not a 'work' but a change of person.
- Recognising the Lordship of Christ in salvation. Just as we cannot save ourselves so we need to acknowledge that God is the only One who can. He has conquered death; He has paid the price; he has '*triumphed openly*'. His Lordship is therefore beyond question. It is what we believe in.
- Practical service. Actions have an effect and make a difference. This difference can be described in various ways. For example, exercising faith in a practical way is like being rooted, firmly established in the ground and growing into a fruitful tree. Another picture is of being built up into a structure and an edifice based on the Foundation.
- Genuineness .What takes place, and the effect of its operation, should always be consistent with former teaching. It is not new, but the effective outworking of what God has always promised, but which has not, until now, been 'delivered to the saints.'" It is characterised by gratitude.

Other dangers lurk. We look at these next.