

- * 7 "The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom;
And with all your acquiring, get understanding.
- 8 "Prize her, and she will exalt you;
She will honor you if you embrace her.
- 9 "She will place on your head a garland of grace;
She will present you with a crown of beauty."

Colossians 2:1–3

2 I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. 2 My goal 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, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Reflection

Yesterday's passage ended with these words.

29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

The Greek here is even more brutal. It has the sense of work which leaves you so weary it is as if you've taken a beating; working to exhaustion. Also mixed into the Greek meaning of these words is the sense of struggling in agony like an athlete running a marathon or a boxer towards the end of a fight. This is how Paul approached his commission from Jesus to preach the gospel to both Jew and Gen-

tile alike. He strained his every physical and moral sinew to present everyone fully mature in Christ. And Paul did so with the energy of Jesus Christ, powerfully alive in him by his Holy Spirit, and continuing Jesus' mission on earth through Paul's preaching, writing, evangelism and service of the church. This is who the Colossians are dealing with. Someone prepared to pour himself out and use himself up, even unto death, for their sake, just as the Lord Jesus did.

Paul continues in the same vein, in today's passage from Colossian 2:1–3,

2 I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. 2 My goal 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.

In mentioning the word ‘contending’ again in this passage Paul once again uses the noun *agon* from which we get the word ‘agony’. The etymology of the word goes back to the Greek Olympic games, a place where athletes agonized in wrestling and footraces, where they fought to win. Paul has been agonizing, fighting for the Colossians with everything he has.

A passer-by was surprised to encounter

the atheist philosopher David Hume going out to hear the great George Whitfield preach. The man said, 'I thought you didn't believe in the gospel.' To which Hume replied, 'I don't, but he does.' In this, George Whitfield followed Paul. Paul exuded a passion for the gospel that overtook every part of his life, and he wants the Colossian church and the nearby church in Laodicea (who too would likely read this letter) to know that even though he has not yet met them, he is pouring himself out on their behalf.

2 I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.

And Paul goes on to the give the reason

why in verse 2,

2 My goal 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, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Paul agonises, struggles, bears a load he fears that he cannot bear, wrestles continually in prayer for the Colossians and Laodiceans, and almost daily risks his life for the Gentile churches that he is planting. He does all this in order that he might achieve his lofty goal for all his churches.

2 My goal is that they may be encour-

aged 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.

Because once they have the full riches of complete understanding about Christ, and all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are found in him, they will no longer need the apostle Paul – because, in the fullest sense, they will have Christ. If they know and love Jesus like this, nothing in this world will be able to touch them, or trouble them for long. Kent Hughes, describes this beautifully in this extended quote, summing up much of what we have learnt about Jesus in Colossians so far:

What you think of Christ, your conception of him, is everything. If you believe in Christ, that he is eternal, without beginning and without end, that he always was continuing; if you believe that he is the creator of everything, every cosmic speck across trillions of light-years of trackless space, the creator of textures and shapes and colours which daily dazzle your eyes; if you believe that he is the sustainer of all creation, the force which is presently holding the atoms of your body, your town, this universe together, and that without him all would dissolve; if you believe he is the mystery, the incarnate reconciler who will one day reconcile the universe and redeem humanity to himself; if you believe that he is the lover of your soul,

who loves you with a love bounded only by his infinitude; then, despite the fact that life will be full of trouble, nothing much will go wrong. Your vision of Christ will quicken and shape your life. What you believe about Christ makes all the difference in the world and in eternity.

Think

Take some extended time today to meditate over Paul's goal for the Colossian church in the passage in front of us. You might like to consider how coming into the full riches of complete understanding about Jesus unlocks encouragement and unity in a Christian community, and vice versa. You might like to think over how your life would change having attained all

the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are found in Christ – how your relationships would change, how your fears would change, how your retirement plans would change, how your sense of peace and fulfilment in life would change, how the way you spend your time and apply yourself to your ministry would change. And of course, the doorway to this knowledge and wisdom, is found in the Scriptures. How diligently are you applying yourself to them? Not just reading them, but immersing yourself in them and becoming them, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and through much agonizing and prayer.

Pray

Pray today for your church but do so using Paul's words, expanding on each thought

as the Holy Spirit directs you to the specific needs in your church community.

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