

6. Serving without compromising

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Unbelievers, even some marginalized “believers” who do not know the Word of God well think that Christians ought to love everyone and accept their lifestyles as they are no matter what.

I believe and agree with the first portion of the statement. But I don’t agree with the second part of it. Because we cannot ignore everything that people do just to get along with everyone for the sake of getting along. We need to help, serve, and love people with great and solid biblical principles in our hearts.

This morning the Holy Spirit is going to teach us through the apostle Paul about serving without compromising as Jesus did for us.

A. ADDING OUR AFFLICTION ONTO CHRIST’S

Colossians 1:24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,

Paul’s enemies made much of the fact that the great apostle was a prisoner of Rome. The false teachers in Colosse probably ridiculed Paul and used this as a weapon to fight the truth of the Gospel. But Paul turned this weapon around and used it to defeat his enemies and to build a closer relationship with the church in Colosse.

The apostle was suffering in his body for the sake of Christ’s body. The implication somehow seems to be that there was something lacking in the sufferings of Christ. In other words, when Paul suffers for them, it completes the suffering of Christ.

This is rather startling because last Sunday we studied the fact that this letter teaches the fullness of Christ. Everything is centered on Him. He is to have the preeminence in all things. Yet here it would seem that there is still something to be done.

I want to make one thing very, very clear. The sufferings of the apostle Paul were not redemptive. He is very careful in his selection of words here. When Paul speaks of the redemption of Christ, he does not speak of suffering but of a cross, a death, and His blood.

The suffering which Jesus could not share was His suffering as the Son of God. He is God, yet He identified Himself with mankind.

He suffered as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. He is the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and none of us can enter into that suffering at all.

In Jesus’ first three hours on the cross, mankind did their worst. There was light from nine o’clock in the morning until noon. In the second three hours, from noon until three o’clock in the afternoon, it was dark. That was when God was doing His best by transferring all the sins of the entire human race past, present, and future unto His Son Jesus. At that time the cross became an altar on which the Lamb of God was slain to take away the sin of the world. That’s a suffering that you and I cannot bear because we are not qualified due to our sinful nature.

On the other hand, there are the sufferings Christ endured which we can share. These are the sufferings that Paul refers to in verse 24.

There is the suffering for righteousness' sake:

John 8:40 But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this.

1 Peter 3:14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."

The popularity of the Christian with the world is in "Inverse Ratio" with his popularity with Christ. If you are popular with the world as a Christian, then you are not popular with Christ. If you are going to be popular with Christ, you are not going to be popular in this world. We cannot be popular with both sides.

B. THE HIDDEN AGE OLD MYSTERY NOW REVEALED

Colossians 1:25-29 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, 26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. 27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. 29 To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

Paul's special message regarding the Gentiles had to do with what he called "the mystery." To us today, a mystery is something eerie and perhaps frightening, but this was not the way the word was defined in Paul's day. The false teachers used this word to describe the inner secrets of their religions. A mystery is a "sacred secret," hidden in the past and now revealed by the Holy Spirit.

In the Biblical sense, a mystery is not a riddle. It is a truth that can only be known by revelation from God, not intuition. Now it can be known because it now has been revealed to His believers after the death and resurrection of Christ.

Jesus Christ came to earth, was rejected by His people, and was crucified. He rose again and returned to heaven. Did this mean that God's promised kingdom for Israel was now abandoned? No, because God had initiated a new program – His mystery – that was not explained by the Old Testament prophets. The mystery is that today God is uniting Jews and Gentiles in the church. When the time comes for His church rapture, Jesus Christ will return and take His people to heaven. After that, He will again deal with Israel as a nation and establish the promised kingdom.

Imagine what this message meant to the Gentiles. They were no longer excluded from the glory and riches of God's grace. During the Old Testament period, a Gentile had to become a Jewish proselyte in order to share in the blessings of Israel. But after our Lord Jesus' death and resurrection, Jews and Gentiles alike are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. No wonder the nationalistic Jewish false teachers opposed Paul. He dared to say, "There is no difference between Jews and gentiles!"

The apostle Paul didn't preach himself, or his opinions, or even lots and lots of entertaining stories as many of today's preachers do to make people feel good about themselves. Paul preached Jesus. The goal of Paul's ministry was to bring people to maturity in Christ, not dependence upon Paul himself.

C. ENCOURAGING THE DISCOURAGED

Colossians 2:1-3 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, 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, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

The word ‘conflict’ is coming from the Greek word ‘agon’ which goes in parallel with the word ‘strive’ from 1:29. The Greek for ‘strive’ is ‘agonizomai’. Of course, we get our English word ‘agony’ from these words. In other words, the apostle Paul is really striving in his prayers for these people in Colosse and Laodicea for their encouragement.

When believers are down and out because of the concerns and worries of their marriage, finance, and other daily things, it is easy for them to be discouraged. Paul knew that discouraged and downcast Christians are easy targets for the world, their own fleshly temptations, and the devil.

Many Christians lack this assurance in their lives. If you have it, you are rich. If you don’t have it, you are poor spiritually.

Many lack full assurance about the character of God. Is He really good and loving? Is He faithful as He claims in the Bible? The answer is in knowing God as He is revealed in His Word the Bible.

Others lack full assurance of their salvation. They wonder, “Is my Christian life for real?” The answer is in knowing that at the bottom line, our salvation rests in God, not in us or what we do.

D. DON’T GET SIDETRACKED

Colossians 2:4-7 Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. 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. 6 As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

During the time of the apostle Paul, these gnostic people were persuading the people of Colosse with their so-called “hidden and deep” wisdom and knowledge.

Many people today are deceived with persuasive words by some preachers and them quoting a whole bunch of out-of-context Bible verses. Even the devil himself quotes Scripture. We must compare everyone’s teaching against God’s Word. We should all have the spirit of the Bereans in Acts 17:11, who compared even the teaching of Paul with Scripture.

Worldly philosophy and psychology have been infiltrating the Christian realm for quite some time since the 1980s and trying to substitute the Bible with theirs. One of the good examples of this unbiblical “Christian psychology” is about “Unlocking your childhood memories” – putting blames on their parents and siblings for one’s sins. They are nothing more than finger-pointing and passing one’s sins to someone else.

I am all for Christian counseling which uses the Bible as a rule and guide. Using anything else is extremely dangerous.

This is a wonderful rule for Christian living. The Colossians were in danger of having started in the simplicity of Jesus but they thought they could be perfected by the search for hidden wisdom offered by the dangerous teachers among them.

This not only applies to the Colossian Christians, but also to all of us. Many great Christian movements started with a handful of people who completely depended on God for everything and God used those faithful people to accomplish many things and perform His miracles. Then the people around them see what is happening and they want to add their own efforts into the work of God and make a royal mess.

Good examples are Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian denominations. They started well with the power of the Holy Spirit a couple of centuries ago but now they are nothing more than religious social clubs in general. Calvary Chapels are not much different. It started with the 1970s Jesus Movement but now we have two Calvary Chapel divisions due to Brian Brodersen who is the late founding pastor Chuck Smith's son-in-law.

Paul mentioned "thanksgiving" here again. A thankful spirit is a mark of Christian maturity. When a believer is abounding in thanksgiving instead of complaining, he is really making progress.

By reviewing these pictures of spiritual progress, we see how the growing Christian can easily defeat the enemy and not be led astray.
If his spiritual roots are deep in Christ, he will not want any other soil.
If Christ is his sure foundation, he has no need to move.
If he is studying and growing in the Word, he will not be easily enticed by false doctrine.
If his heart is overflowing with thanksgiving, he will not even consider turning from the fullness he has in Christ.
A grounded, growing, and grateful believer will not be led astray from Jesus.

E. BEWARE

Colossians 2:8-10 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. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

When we take what man says as even near in authority to what God says, we cheat ourselves.

The false teachers did not go out and win the lost, no more than the cultists do today. They "kidnapped" converts from churches. Most of the people I have talked with who are members of cults were at one time associated with a Christian church of one denomination or another, like two Jehovah's Witnesses people who came to our home one Saturday morning several years ago. One of them was a former Catholic nun who should have learned that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior, and very God Himself. But she chose to go from a nun to none.

How is it possible for false teachers to capture people? The answer is simple: These "captives" are ignorant of the truths of the Word of God like Hosea 4:6 says.

F. APPLICATIONS

- 1) We need to remember that we cannot perfect in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit.
- 2) A grounded, growing, and the grateful believer will not be led astray from Jesus.