

**Spiritual Maturity:  
Striving to Connect the Saints to the Riches of Christ  
Colossians 2:1-3**

**Intro:**

- In her book *The Happiness Effect: How Social Media is Driving a Generation to Appear Perfect at Any Cost*, Donna Freitas says that social media subtly puts pressure on college students and young adults into presenting themselves as successful and happy at any cost. She says, *"This is the great dander of social media: with its assumptions of perfection, it keeps young adults from courageously opening up the depths of their experience to seek God's action in and through their moments of loss, rejection and fear."*<sup>1</sup>

Our desire to look perfect or that we . . . **"have it all together"** is the result of the Fall. Even our first parents, Adam and Eve, after they sinned in the Garden, sewed fig leaves together to cover their nakedness. Since that time humans have been sewing fig leaves together in one form or another to cover over their imperfections. Social media is just the latest fig leaf.

- **TRANSITION:** God will not allow us to pose as if everything is okay. Last Sunday we saw that Paul's purpose in ministry was to present everyone mature in Christ but that presentation of maturity and perfection will not be realized until we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ so until that time we are imperfect but, as Christians, we are in the process of maturing spiritually.
- **One of the reasons we have added a regular time of confession in our worship service is to remind us of our need for the gospel.** It is to remind us that we have not yet arrived and that perfection is not something we can achieve here on earth. Confessing our sins, our weaknesses and imperfections as a church drives us to remember our need of Christ. It drives us to the cross to confess our sins, our needs, our weaknesses and our failures. We do not have to pretend to be perfect because we have been given a Perfect Savior in Christ.
- **The gospel challenges our assumptions that we have arrived because we have not arrived.** It is like the old adage: *I am not okay and you're not okay but that's okay because we will be okay.* Until that time we will be maturing toward perfection spiritually.
- **TRANSITION:** The question we are going to answer over the next four weeks is: **what does growth in spiritual maturity look like?** What are evidences of it in our lives?
- **This is the question I believe Paul is answering in Colossians 2:1-12.** Last Sunday we saw that Paul's gospel-centered purpose was to present the saints before God mature spiritually? The next four sermons in Colossians will identify what this spiritual maturity looked like:
  - **May 14: vv. 1-3** a spiritually maturing heart **strives** to connect the saints to the riches of Christ
  - **May 28: vv. 4-5** a spiritually maturing heart **rejoices** in the spiritual growth of the saints
  - **June 4: vv. 6-7** a spiritually maturing heart **teaches** others to abide in Christ
  - **June 11: vv. 8-12** a spiritually maturing **leads** other to be captivated with Christ
- **This morning we are going to look at vv. 1-3 and see how spiritually growth is evidenced by the saints in their drawing on the riches of Christ in their lives.**
- **Here are the four evidences of that spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is evidenced in . . .**
  1. *Striving for the vision and mission of the gospel*
  2. *Striving to encourage the saints*

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<sup>1</sup> Magazine: *Christianity Today*, March 2017, Books, Movies, and the Arts Reviews: "Never Let Them See You Cry", by Andrew Root, pgs. 57-59.

3. *Striving to love the saints.*

4. *Striving to help the saints draw on the riches of Christ*

#### I. **Spiritual growth is evidenced in striving for the vision and mission of the gospel (v. 1)**

- Our first evidence of spiritual growth is from Paul's example of ministry. What we see in Paul's ministry is how he labored with a clear vision and mission to see others mature in Christ. He had never met the Colossian or Laodicean Christians face-to-face but he had met them heart-to-heart and because they were in Christ and he loved them he labored to the point of exhaustion for them to grow in Christ.
  - **Look at Colossians 1:28-29 . . .**
  - **Colossians 2:1 is connected to what he just said in order to explain his purpose and intent in ministry.** He is making an argument in this letter. The Holy Spirit has him using logic to connect one thought to another so the church will see what he is doing and who they will see as their purpose in ministry.
- **How did he strive and labor for them?**
  - **He prayed:** I think primarily what we see was that Paul and his missionary team in Colossians 4, labored for the church in prayer.
  - **He gave** of his own money
  - **He left** what was comfortable and went to strange people in strange places in the world. He said in Romans 15 that he wanted to go where the gospel had not been named. He wanted to go!
  - **He wrote letters:** He not only wrote to them but to other churches as well. Some of them he had met and some not. It is safe to say that most of the people Paul wrote to he never met. Just look around, you and I never met Paul but his labor of love in writing was for us.
  - **He suffering:** Paul suffered for the sake of taking the gospel for the church and to those who have never heard. Listen to how he described his afflictions in **2 Corinthians 11:23-28**. He was addressing those in the church who thought they were super-apostles, *"Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; <sup>26</sup> on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; <sup>27</sup> in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. <sup>28</sup> And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches."*
- **What Paul is saying is that** he labored for the sake of the gospel to be known by those whom he had never met.

#### **Application:**

**It is worth it to fight for the spiritual maturity of others, even those you have never met.**

**Illst: How many of you have participated in athletics?** Golf? Tennis? Baseball? Running? Basketball? Football? Wrestling?

Anyone has a gym membership (that you use)? I am not trying to be exclusive if you have never participated in organized sports or athletics. I ask for sports because the word, *struggle*, that Paul uses here in v. 1 is the same word he used at the end of chapter 1. The imagery of the Greek word *struggle* is that of an athlete agonizing and toiling to workout, exercise, stay in the race and not quit. It is the difficulty and pain in an athletic context.

Even if you have not done sports, perhaps you have a gym membership to lose weight or workout because you love it. You know the struggle it can be. Early mornings, late evenings, lifting weights or running all for a goal—here is my point—anything worth doing is a struggle. I mean no one is going to labor and struggle and toil for something that in the end has no value.

**Anything worth doing is a struggle and what we need to get in our mind is that striving for the spiritual maturity of others is infinitely worth it!**

- The gym or the treadmill or the elliptical machine, competing or training SHOULD NOT be the only place where we give ourselves to struggling, striving and resistance. Let's not only experience the "runners high" or the "adrenaline of lifting weights" but also the excitement of discipling, praying and evangelism.
- **Spiritual growth means we give ourselves to the vision and mission of the gospel.** We are not the Apostle Paul but we can do what he did: PRAY, GIVE, GO, WRITE LETTERS, SUFFER WITH PEOPLE AND FOR PEOPLE SO THAT WE FILL UP WHAT IS LACKING IN CHRIST'S AFFLICTIONS.
- **Growth in the vision and mission of the gospel means we will give ourselves for those whom we have never met face-to-face. It means we gather together in our little church and grow and go . . .**
  - **into our neighborhoods** . . . meeting new neighbors . . . people who will move in . . . our summer calendar is set up in such a way as to mobilize our body to strive to take the gospel into our neighborhoods/city. All summer we are going to be talking about loving God and loving our neighbors. We will be praying . . . giving . . . going
  - **in Iowa (BCI)** . . . as we partner with our state convention to give and help plant church in areas of our state some of us have never seen. We pray . . . we give . . . and we go (some people intentionally move to places to plant churches in our state)
  - **in the US/North America (NAMB)** . . . likewise we partner in the same with the North American Mission Board . . . we just finished praying for some of our missionaries who serve in the US and Canada . . . we give a portion of our dollars to NAMB and some go as missionaries for NAMB
  - **in our world (IMB and organizations)** . . . we pray, give and go . . .
    - **We have people going all over the world in the next few months.** They will be taking the gospel to people they have never seen and praying for them before they get there.
    - **Praying for the persecuted church.** VOM is a ministry that strives to keep Christians informed on the persecution of our brothers and sisters around the world.
    - **Just this week I received information in preparation for the World Summit in Defense of Persecuted Christians.** They report that 75% of the world's population lives in areas with severe religious restrictions. They also report that 215 millions Christians across the globe are suffering *high, very high or extreme persecution* simply because they call on the name of Jesus.
- **Another way to think about striving for those you have never met is to strive to see the next generation love the gospel of Jesus Christ and His church:**
  - **Have you ever considered what kind of church we will leave the next generation?**
    - If we do not give ourselves to the vision and mission of Christ's church what kind of church will be left for them. I am always convicted of what King Hezekiah said in **2 Kings 20** after he had showed the Babylonians the entire kingdom of Judah. Isaiah told him that destruction would come to his children after him for this sin. Hezekiah's reply was

basically, “*Well at least there will be peace in my day.*” May we never shirk our responsibility for the next generation like Hezekiah did.

- It might be easy to look at the local church and think, “*This is hopeless! Let’s find something easier and less difficult. Let’s back off the gospel of Christ and have peace in our generation.*” May we never cease striving for the mission of the gospel in the church.

- **What kind of legacy will you leave your family?**

- What will your children’s children say about you and your striving for the next generation to know Christ and His afflictions on the cross?
- How will you pass along your faith in Christ to the next generation, the generation you have never seen? This will be one of the topics of our Foundations this summer.

- **These kinds of applications can make us feel guilty for not doing enough or working harder.** So I want to ask the question: how does the work of Christ come to bear on verse 1?

- **The gospel of Jesus Christ calls us to have a vision and mission for life and ministry that is bigger than what we can simply see with our eyes.** The Apostle Paul said in **Colossians 1:29** that he was struggling with all of the power that Christ was working in him. When we give ourselves to His vision and mission of people knowing the gospel we join Him in His ministry that is empowered by His Spirit. His eternal power will make an eternal impact through our finite lives.

## **II. Spiritual growth is evidenced in the desire to encourage the saints (v. 2) “*that their hearts may be encouraged*”**

- When you first read it you might think it sounds like a verse you might find on a coffee mug or on a meme or on a t-shirt. It sounds like a sweet little saying but in reality it is a very strong call for transformation.
- **The word for *encouraged* is not strong enough.** A better translation is *strengthened*. When we consider the context, Paul wanted to guard the church against false teaching and teachers. So in **v. 5** he calls for their *firmness of faith*, in **v. 6** he calls for their *faith to be established*, in **v. 8** he tells them *to not be taken captive* and finally **v. 12** he tells them that *they have been buried with Christ in baptism and raised by their faith in Christ*. So he is calling for their hearts to be more than simply encouraged but to be *strengthened*.
- **Not just *strengthened* in general but *in their hearts*.** The biblical word for heart is the control center of a person. It is the decision-making, willing part of who you are. The executive center of your being. It is the place from where all of your decisions and choices flow. Paul wants this part of the believers to be strengthened. This is about rootedness, firmness, and groundedness. He wants the very core of who they are to be strengthened. I often summarize this by saying, “We do what we do because we love what we love” and we love what we love from the control center of our lives.
- **Paul needed to strengthen the hearts of the Colossians believers because they were in danger of falling prey to false doctrines of false teachers.**
- **How was Paul putting courage into the hearts of the believers?** He was putting it in with the only thing that changes the heart and guards the heart—the gospel of Jesus Christ. The saints in Colossae were in danger of drifting from the gospel because of false teachers and demonic spirits that were attacking the church and the weapon of their warfare was prayer and the gospel.

**Quick Application Point . . . we will develop this more fully at the end . . .**

- The way to evaluate your heart is to ask what are you spending time, money, energy and passion on? Whatever you find controls your thoughts and decisions that is what is ruling your heart. So is it the gospel that your mind naturally goes to? If not, then we must repent and return to our first love.

### III. Spiritual growth is evidenced in love for the saints. (v. 2) *"being knit together in love"*

- ***"being knit together in love"*** is the natural result of the work of striving to strengthen the hearts of others. As you invest in others with the gospel, as you make disciples and see them move toward spiritual maturity your hearts will be strengthened and knit together in love.
- **For our hearts are knit together** in love is not a Hallmark Card kind of love of being strengthened and knit together it is how the communal aspect of the church strengthens and knits our hearts together in the love of Christ.
- **Some of my most treasured relationships** in life are a result of someone discipling me or me discipling someone else. If you have ever discipled someone or had someone disciple you, you know what I mean.
- The *knitting together of hearts* is a weaving together of the love of Christ as He strengthens our hearts.
- **Illst: The making of the Viking sword: Ulfberht (ulf-bae-ert)**
  - **The Ulfberht Sword was the sword of Viking kings.** It was made of crucible steel, which, at the time of its production was hundreds of years ahead of its time.
  - Crucible steel was very hard steel and would break the blades of other swords when used in battle. The secret of the steel was its production through heat and hammering of the steel.
  - Experts studied the steel under an electron microscope and discovered that the crucible steel the Vikings produced, through the process of heating and hammering, resulted in a knitting together of the steel in interlocking connections.
  - It resulted in a sword that could withstand the rigors of battle so that the sword of was both a weapon of defensive and offense superiority.
  - It was the knitting together of the steel that made it so strong!

### Application

- **Disciple-making that strives for spiritual maturity strengthens the heart and knits together the hearts of those in the process.** The heat of discipleship helps to hammer out the impurity resulting in love of Christ locking together the hearts of all of those involved.
- **Before we make more application let's consider the remainder of our text, vv. 2b-3 because all of this text is connected.**

### IV. Spiritual growth is evidenced in striving to help people live life in the riches of Christ (vv. 2b-3)

- ***"to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."***
- **The English words here "reach" or "attain" depending on your translation are not in the original text.** They are supplied by translators to clarify the meaning of the text. The text is conveying Paul's *purpose or intent*, which is consistent with what he had been saying. He was explaining his purpose in ministry since v. 28.
- **Greek word "eis" in the original text is where the English words "to reach" or "attain to" are derived.** *Eis* is a little word is a spatial word with big meaning and it implies *"to connect or to touch."*
- Paul's purpose was, *"to help others have or connect to, to touch and draw upon"* the riches found in Christ. He wanted them to touch the riches of Christ.

- **How do you help someone do that?** You take them by the hand and lead them to the truth of God's word.
- The word **hidden** does not mean hidden like you have to search for them but the Greek word means they are deposited in Christ. *Christ is the Repository* of all of the treasures of knowledge, wisdom and understanding that gives a believer full assurance of the grace of God in Christ and assurance of salvation.
- The Apostle Paul again was stacking description on top of description of Christ in order to show them that everything was in Jesus so that the Colossians Christians would draw from the riches of Christ. Listen to the text one more time, *"the riches of full assurance of understanding of the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are **"hidden"** all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge."*
  - **The false teaches in the church were using the same words.** The Gnostics talked about the mystery hidden but you could only know it through their doctrine and their version of Jesus. They twisted the person of Christ so that he was not the Messiah from God. His death on the cross was not enough so you must add their religious techniques and trinkets to your approach to Christ.
  - They wanted people to buy into to their vision of Christ and treasure their wisdom and knowledge instead of what the Scriptures taught. It was a Jesus-plus religion or a gospel-plus approach to God.
  - **Their approach was to pull people away from the word of God, the teaching of the Apostles and the church.** They needed to isolate them and get them away from the body of Christ so they could trip them up with their fools' gold.
  - Paul wanted them to see that growth in spiritual maturity is a community project. It is not done in isolation.
- **To touch the treasures of wisdom and knowledge they needed to be in the church and be strengthened in their hearts and knit together in love through the process of discipleship and disciple-making.**
- **First what were the treasures of wisdom and knowledge they were to draw upon?**
  - These are similar terms and Paul's reference here looks back at **Proverbs 2:1-8**, the passage quoted on page 2 of our worship guide. He is saying that Jesus is the embodiment of this wisdom. **Proverbs 2:1-8** was pointing to Christ being this wisdom and knowledge.
  - **Here is how we might define both wisdom and knowledge.** They are skills with regard to the realities of life. They are the ability to apply knowledge in connection with what the circumstances require and this takes wisdom.
  - **Here is my question: what is ultimate reality?** Jesus Christ is Ultimate Reality. He is the reality toward which all realities lead. All knowledge is found in Him. All wisdom is found in Him. If you are truly seeking wisdom and knowledge then your quest will lead you to Christ because He is the Repository of the treasures of knowledge and wisdom. He is Ultimate Reality.
  - **So it is like this . . . who is the person of Christ to you? What is the Biblical doctrine of Jesus?** *"What you think of Christ, your conception of him, is everything. If you believe in Jesus Christ, that he is eternal, without beginning and without end, that he always was continuing; if you believe that he is creator of everything, every cosmic speck across trillions of light-years of trackless space, the creator of the treasures and shapes and colors which daily dazzle your eyes; if you believe that he is the sustainer of all creation, the [One Who] is presently holding the atoms of your body, in your town, this universe together, and that without him all would dissolve; if you believe that 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 should, 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.*"<sup>2</sup>

#### Application:

- **We cannot grow in spiritual maturity in isolation.** We learn to draw on riches of full assurance of our salvation in Christ by being strengthened in our hearts and having our lives knit together in love for the body of Christ. It is all about Christ. Paul was telling the that the riches of full assurance cannot be properly known apart from the cultivation of brotherly love within the Christian community.
- **Here is how this works:** when we love Jesus and love God's word and love His Church so that we are united in love with each other, the mystery of Christ unfolds and we are *in touch with and connected to* "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."
- **Here is my point: you do not touch the riches of Christ in isolation.**
  - **I am not saying you cannot have very meaningful times alone with God.** I am not saying that. Assurance of faith in Christ, drawing on the treasure of riches of Christ, His knowledge and His wisdom are not done in isolation.
  - **Assurance is a community project.** Are you in a small group doing life with them?
  - You see assurance of our faith in Christ is a wealth of riches that is only touched through one of the key means of grace God has given us—the church. This is one of the main reasons at Grand we will call for people to covenant with us in membership. Are you a covenant member of a church?
- **What we do is lead people to know in a deeply assured, confident way—Christ.** The Spirit is saying that our purpose as a church is to touch the riches of Christ in the word of God among the people of God and then be mobilized to take this into our neighborhoods, city, state and the world. We then lead people to draw upon and touch the riches of Christ so, by the grace of God they know and love Jesus.

#### Conclusion:

- **So what are you spending your life on?** At the end of it all what will be said about you by those who have never seen your face: you future family, the church you leave behind, the legacy you leave in this life?
- **Teddy Roosevelt once said:** *"It is not the critic who counts, the credit belong to the man in the arena, who's face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at best knows the end of things is high achievement and at worst, at the very worst, if he fails, he fails while daring greatly."*<sup>3</sup>
- **I know what you may be thinking.** *"Michael that sure does press on my will pretty hard. Are you trying to motivate me with guilt."* Actually I am not.
- Look at **Hebrews 13:12-16**, after the preacher had told the people that the Old Testament sacrificial was insufficient he showed them the gospel and called for action. Listen, *"So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. <sup>13</sup> Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. <sup>14</sup> For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. <sup>15</sup> Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. <sup>16</sup> Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."*

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<sup>2</sup> Kent Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ*, p. 54.

- Brothers and sisters if we fail, let's fail while daring greatly for the gospel of Jesus Christ for here we have no lasting city.
- **Blessing:** *"Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever." Amen. (Adapted from Jude 24–25)*