

Colossians 2 (Conrad Bowman) (Summer 2006)

Remember in chapter 1, right toward the end of the chapter, Paul was talking about his attitude in his sufferings. And the attitude is one of rejoicing. And the basis of that rejoicing is the fact that he views his sufferings as filling full, he said, the sufferings of Christ. Of completing the suffering of Christ. In other words, he realized that Christ's suffering was on our behalf. That every ailment; every ill, every bad feeling. Everything that comes to us that causes us pain or grief or affliction, is part of what Christ bore on the cross for us. And He was appointed to do that from before the world began. Now there's a line that Paul keeps bringing us back to, and that's the plan of God from eternity past that's being worked out in our present. And there's a connection between what we experience on a day to day basis, and the original decree of God in setting His Son aside to go to the cross and bear those afflictions. He had everyone of those in mind. So Paul says, when he suffers, he knows he's filling full the suffering that Christ bore on the cross for us; as indeed, everyone of us should have that in mind. So it was Christ to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles. And that mystery among the Gentiles in chapter 1 was the Church being drawn together.

Now, lest we forget that, here in chapter 2, he's going to go back to that but he's going to approach it from a different angle. Watch this.

1. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea,

We're going to come back to that in a little bit.

1. ... and for all those who have not personally seen my face,

In other words, His suffering is going to be shared with all. The ones that have seen. And also the ones that have just heard about Him, and know about Him by reputation. So you see what Paul is saying is, he has a ministry to people he will never know, and who will never lay eyes on him. And so do we all. "That" introduces a purpose. For the purpose. For the purpose

2. that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining [or achieving] to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding,

Now, that full assurance of understanding says that I, as a believer, can approach the Word, and also approach my life, and have every confidence that God will unfold to me, in the moment when it's happening, or in its own time when it's right for me to know, He will unfold to me and understanding of what my life is all about. Where it's going. And He may not specifically tell me who I'm influencing. But He gives me the assurance that what I teach will bear fruit. Maybe not even in my lifetime, but it will bear fruit as long as it's consistent with the Word. Now, watch this.

2. ... full assurance of understanding resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, of Christ Himself,

Now in chapter 1, he's talking about the mystery as being the Church. That's what he was saying in Ephesians. If you remember Ephesians when he's talking about, "we are God's masterpiece." On display. His poem to all creation. And that's what we are as a Church and as a believer. Well now Paul's going back to that, and he's saying God's mystery is Christ Himself. In other words, from the very beginning when God the Father expressed His will, what was seen was Christ coming out of that. God spoke, and Christ was emitted from that speech. Not omitted, but emitted from that speech. He became a person. He became the Son of God, spoken right out of the Father. The Son of God in eternity past then – God the Son – became the Only Begotten Son in eternity past. Now there're two names. One is the Son of God, and that's His name relative to deity, to the Trinity. There's the Only Begotten Son of God, and that's His name before the Father relative to man. Because it's the Only Begotten Son who became flesh; who dwelt among us, and bore the suffering that Paul is talking about; his affliction and his suffering made complete. Now I want you to see that, because the way Paul is presenting it here and throughout these epistles – the way he's presenting that – there's a solid line drawn from the instant of creation from the mouth of the Father right to you today; and on through you to the eternity which is to come. It's all one instant with the Father. It's all one moment with the Son. It's an act between the Father and the Son that we see taking place. And as the details unfold, we see that we're part of that single act. That when the Father set the Son aside to glorify Him, He set us aside in Him to glorify Him before the foundation of the world. Your life is not a mistake. Nothing that happens to you has not been considered in the plan of God. That's the impact of this Book. That's the impact of this whole letter. That's the impact of Ephesians, and of Colossians and of Philippians. And now we're going to see how Paul unfolds in the next study when we get to – we've already gone through Titus. When we get to 1st and 2nd Timothy, the details of how that

Church is put together in order to be displayed as the masterpiece of God's work is going to begin to unfold. Now he's going to make some very high demands of people. The qualifications of elder are in there. The qualifications of pastor are in there. The qualifications of believers in their walk is in those Books; and we're going to pay perfect attention to them now when we get there. It's going to be necessary. I'm not so interested in you understanding the history of these Books as I am you understanding the doctrinal development of these Books. Because what Paul is saying, as these things unfold, is that you individually are part of God's perfect plan from before the world was ever created all the way to the time when He refreshes it; restores it; and cleanses it; and purifies it in the final days of this world before the New Earth and New Heavens descend from His throne. And so it's real important because these Books that we're going through right now in Colossians is certainly a core of that. It's the unfolding that in gorgeous detail that up until this time had never been seen by anybody. So when you read this verse, for this purpose,

2. that their hearts might be encouraged, having been knit together in *[agape, in]* love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself,
3. in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Where are they deposited? In the Lord Jesus Himself. When God creates us – the Father – when He creates us as His masterpiece; He unfolds the Lord Jesus Himself because He's deposited in Him all the treasures of wisdom; and all the treasures of knowledge. Now in verse 4. The reason I say this, Paul says, is in order that

4. ... no one will delude you with persuasive argument.

Man, that's a mouth full, isn't it? There are so many schemes out there today of how the Church ought to be put together; and what we ought to be doing; and how we ought to be living. And yet, the command of God, through his Apostle Paul, the command is very simple.

Let this be your ambition to live a quiet life; tend to your own business; work with your hands so that you might not be in need;

and may be at peace with all men. [Paraphrase from 1st Thessalonians 4:11-12].

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life; work with your own hands; tend to your own business so that you might not be in need and might live at peace with all men.

Now where do you find that? You find that in Thessalonians. Another one of Paul's epistles. You see these things are all unfolding. You see how neatly that fits together in verse 4. God is going to give us full assurance of understanding resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery that is Christ Himself. In order that; in order that,

4. ... no one will delude you with persuasive argument.

We can't be deluded because we're depending on the Spirit of God to give us the wisdom and the knowledge that's on deposit with Christ. And the more we walk in light as He's in light, the better we'll understand God's purpose in Him. Not in us, but God's purpose in Him. In Christ. If we understand that, and we're walking in Him, don't you see how close we are to the heart of the Father. So Christ says when you pray, you go in your closet and you pray to the Father. He didn't say you pray to me. He didn't say you pray to the Spirit. He said you pray to the Father, because the Father is the source of it all. That ties everything together. As we honor the Father, and as we recognize the Father in His position, we are compliant with the eternal plan of God. And we're walking right in the path that Christ is walking. And the mystery begins to unfold for us all the more. Verse 5

5. For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit,

How can he say that? Because it's the same Spirit, and we're walking in the same Jesus. We're walking in the same ascended man. So whether I'm here or whether I'm in Kosciusko, Mississippi; or whether I'm in London; or whether I'm in China; or whether I'm behind bars somewhere; or whether I'm in a hospital at death's door; or whether I'm in a nursery where life begins; we're walking in the same man. And that man is the ascended man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability [what?] of your faith in Christ.

You see the thing that binds us together is our common faith. And that's what Paul is saying. He's talking to people that have never laid eyes on him, and he says to them. I see your good faith and your discipline and your constancy. I can tell you this. I stand before you to teach this lesson, based on the prayers – I don't know how many. There's not way to know how many. There's a Sunday school class at Roso Creek Baptist Church that prays for me every Sunday. There's a Sunday school class and a whole church full of people in Jackson, Mississippi, that pray for me every Sunday and every Wednesday faithfully. I know you guys are standing in the gap for me constantly. Every day I sense it. I can feel it. Not only that, there's material support that you've given us. Your generosity is just overwhelming when I think about it. And I appreciate it and love it so much, because of who you are in our common standing. And the beauty of this is, we're all at the same time testifying to the same thing. That's faith and confidence and assurance that God will give us understanding through every circumstance; whether it's mine or whether it's yours. We're pursuing the same thing. The knowledge of Christ. And that's very, very important; and it also puts us in the exact path of Paul; and in the exact path of the Lord Himself when He walked this earth for some thirty-three years.

5. For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.

6. As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,

How did you receive Him? You received Him by faith. You trusted Him. You looked at your life, and at some point in your life – at some point – you came to realize, this is for the birds. This life I am living is going nowhere. There's got to be more to it than this. And you came to realization of what Christ had done for you. And you turned loose of your own work on your own behalf, and you chose to accept His work on your behalf. Now if you believe that you did that on your own, you're a Baptist. If you believe God moved you to do that and He brought you to that decision, then you're probably a Presbyterian. If you're still considering that decision, and you're really not sure that it's real, then you're probably Methodist. Choices that you've got along the way. But,

6. As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,

Walk is a present participle. It's a present tense that means you continue to walk as long as it's the present. You walk, and you walk, and you walk, and you walk. You don't stop. You keep walking. As long as God gives you breath, you walk in Him. That's what it means. It doesn't mean walk in Him one time, and then you sit down and rest and you'll catch up later. That's not what it means. It means to walk, and to walk, and to walk, and to walk; and continue to do that. You see, there's that quiet constancy again that goes along with those verses that we talked about from Thessalonians. Make it your ambition to live a quiet life; a quiet life; work with your own hands; there you are, walking in Him. Work with your own hands so that you won't be in need, and might live at peace with all men. Now if you're walking in Him, the Spirit's working around you. I can tell you. He's working all around you, because the presence of God is what you're walking in. You're walking in light, as He's in light.

7. having been firmly rooted ...

There's that understanding back from verse 2.

7. having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.

There's no way that you can not be grateful for everything that He's brought you to when you're continuing to walk in Him. Now, firmly rooted is where your faith is. You're firmly rooted because your roots are planted in Christ. And, you're being built up in your understanding – that's day by day by day. That's what He's doing to you by the circumstances you're going through.

8. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

In other words, don't let the things that impress you that work on the job begin to affect how you walk in the Lord. Don't let Madison Avenue marketing affect the way you approach your Christian life. Another way to say that – and I've used it for years – is that if it works for unbelievers, it is not of the Spirit. If an

unbeliever can take a technique and make it work for his own benefit, especially with other unbelievers, then you can bet it is not a spiritual principle. See what I'm saying? That's – in terms of the way to build a church, or the way to build a ministry – Godly principles require the Spirit's infusion and knowledge. Human ingenuity does not require that spiritual input. It will work regardless of what you're doing. Whether you're trying to build a business or build a church. You can do it with good marketing. One will get you a Spirit filled Church; and one will get you a church filled with people. You have to be careful. Your life is the same way. You can order your life according to principles of organization and good business, and you can become a successful businessman; and at the same time, completely lose yourself and your walk in Christ which is to be quiet and unassuming and working with your own hands. Now this is real tricky, and we can talk about specifics sometime – anytime you want to – if you jot them down and get them to me; and we'll talk about specifics on that if you want to. But I want you to see the principle first.

7. ... just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.

That's our life. Our life is gratefulness to God for what He brings it to.

8. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world [which are rules that the world runs by], rather than according to Christ.

9. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

That's in Christ. All the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form. And bodily form has to do with,

He who knew no sin became sin for us in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. [2 Corinthians 5:21].

Christ come in flesh.

10. and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;

There is nothing higher than He is, and that's what's being emphasized here. Now, in Him, you've been made complete. You were without Him, and then you came to Him. And He fills you with His Spirit; and He fills you with Himself;

and now you are everything God the Father intended you to be from the moment before creation.

11. and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands,

In other words, that which was superfluous about you was cut away. He took it out of you. What was it that He took out? If you go to Romans 6, you'll find that we were joined to Christ in His death. And what died was the "old you." You died to sin. That was cut away from you. Sin has no connection with the "new creation you." There is the circumcision not made with hands. Abraham's circumcision – bloody circumcision – was an emblem to him of something that was going to happen later. We on the other hand were joined to Christ and baptized into His death. And we came out of that circumcised from sin's effect on us whatsoever. It can't reach the "new creation" because the "new creation" doesn't know anything about it. He's dead to it. The "old man," however, still likes to walk in that old fleshly nature. Hmm. Verse 11.

11. and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

When Christ died, we died to the flesh. When you were dead in your transgressions – no. Having been buried with Him in your baptism – in Romans 6 – in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead. See, our faith goes back to the Father's declaration that the Only Begotten Son would be the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world. That's when it all occurred. So we're seeing this contract between the Father and Son work its way out in our own time; speaking of the first century when Christ was there in the flesh. Now, we see in it retrospect, having been buried with Him and joined with Him in His death, and also participating in His resurrection to newness of life – and that's what we have. And we walk in that newness of life. Today, that's the mystery which is the Church; and it's also the mystery which is every believer. We

13. ... were dead in our transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh ...

In the past, we were joined to Him and He made you alive together with Him

13. ... having forgiven us all our transgressions,

Everyone of them have been forgiven. He remembers them no more.

14. having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, and which was hostile to us;

That, my friend, is the Old Testament Law. The Law identified sin; and marked it; and controlled it. He cancelled that out. That's the certificate of death, which was the Law.

14. ... and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

15. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities,

Angelic opponents of God.

15. ... He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

Or through it, which was His death on the cross.

16. Therefore let no one be your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—

Now notice he's included Babylonian practices; of worship of the sun, and the moon. And he's also included Jewish practices of Sabbath days, and he says this about it.

16. let no man act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—

They've all passed away in light of the cross.

17. things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance [of it all] belongs to Christ [Himself].

18. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement

And this self-infliction of harm; and of marking the body is an abomination to God.

18. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,

So dreams and visions are no means of revelations to believers. That's not what we depend on. We walk by faith, not by sight. And it doesn't matter whether that sight is daylight or comes in the night in the middle of your sleep. We don't walk by sight. We don't walk by sight. We walk by faith. In other words, we walk on the basis of what God has told us, and we've accepted and believed. Not on the basis of anything we see. Whether it's wide open daylight or dark as pitch. We don't walk on that basis. We walk on the basis of what we know to be true.

18. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize

Which is salvation.

18. ... by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind.

I can't pass that without some comment on these preachers who will stand in front of a crowd of people and claim to have seen with their mind people with certain ailments that they're going to heal. Those are the visions – exactly what he's talking about here, that are not to be believed.

19. and not holding fast to the head [to Christ], from whom the entire body [that's us], being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

Our eyes are on Christ. Not on visions; and not on stories; but there're on Him, and we recognize that we grow on the basis of understanding – that's what verse 2 was all about – which comes from God.

20. If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world,

First class condition, and you have.

20. Since you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,

21. "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"

22. (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)

That's exactly what He said He nailed to the cross. The Laws. We don't live on the basis of Law. We live on the basis of faith.

22. ... --in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

Commandments and teachings of men refer to the Law which was prevalent in Israel, and the teachings of men which came out of Babylon and Egypt

23. These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

And I will tell you today, with the prevalence and just propagation of tattoos, we're looking at a direct violation of what God says we should be; and that's – it's not the tattoo itself. It's the need to display an identity of some kind on one's person. Why a tattoo? Isn't that the epitome of a visual display of something? Isn't that the absolute epitome of it? And what is the believer's clarion cry? We walk by faith. Not by sight. The "New Creation" believer does not depend on what he sees or she sees in order to be drawn to something, or in order to shy away from something? We walk on the basis of what we know to be true. Visual displays, and visual statements and banners that draw attention are all things that violate the very substance of what Paul is presenting here in this second chapter of Colossians. It's amazing, isn't it? Think about it in terms of your church. Do you have to advertise it? Do you have to put on "showy" presentations, or should your presentations be built around substance. Am I saying there should never be entertaining? Absolutely not. I appreciate good humor. I appreciate a good show as much as anybody, but we cannot let that drift over into the area where we're presenting entertainment to draw people rather than content. It's not the entertainment value that's important to Christ. Nor is the entertainment value of what we offer that builds people up. It's the

content of what we offer. It has to be solidly positioned and drawn from the Lord Himself. Because it's in Him that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form. It's in Him that we find the light in which we are to walk. It's in Him that our mind finds rest while we make it our ambition to lead a quiet life; and work with our own hands. Just as God commanded you in order that we might not be in need and live at peace with all men. It's a marvelous plan. It's simple. It's too simple, really, because people think it ought to be harder than this. People would think that in order to prosper as a group of believers, we've got to be busy drawing people in. Wait a minute. That's precisely what the Spirit says is His job, and He's busy doing that. Now we don't want to get out there and make a big splash taking His business. We've got enough to do. Okay? He's in the job of sales. Sales belong to the Spirit of God. Our job is packaging and cleaning up, and making sure the shop stays neat. And making sure that the materials we put out are all very, very consistent; and making sure that everybody that comes to this place understands that our center is the Lord Jesus Christ. And our purpose is His revelation. And our means is by walking in Him. And our faith is firmly rooted and grounded in Him. And that our confidence is in the knowledge that God is at work doing His work in the world. And what we offer those people that come to us is an opportunity to join us in that endeavor; and it's a grand and mysterious endeavor. God bless.

Father we thank You for the time You've given us the opportunity to study this marvelous letter. Burn its words and its purpose right into our hearts and minds; and help us Father to learn to walk quietly through our days, watchful for people who are thirsty for the relationship to the Lord that we so easily and casually take for granted too often. Keep us awake and alive and alert. In Christ's name, because He paid for it every bit. Amen.

[This recording was transcribed on a tape recorder, and transmitted to a digital format. The earlier recordings, of which this is one, were made on a tape recorder. Some are more audible than others].