

## **“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord”**

*“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted And built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught (Col 2:7)*

The first chapter of Paul’s inspired Epistle to the Colossians closes with the Apostle speaking of his “labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily” (1:29). So it is, that Paul, as with all faithful men, recognised that the fruits of his labours were not of his own might, but were according to the working of the Lord, which “effectually worketh also” in them that “believe” (1Thes 2:13). This is the true spirit of discipleship - to “strive” for the things of the Truth, yet entrust all things to the hand of the Father, that all things may be worked out according to His Will and Purpose.

But the Second Chapter describes one aspect of that for which Paul strove - unity amongst the believers:

“I would that ye knew what conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicia, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love ...” (Col 2:1).

Here, the Greek for “conflict” is the word from which “striving” in 1:29 is derived, emphasising the point that the striving for unity was a central part of the labours of the apostle - he was not simply concerned about the work of preaching, but also about ensuring that those who received his words were united in a common understanding of those things.

The term “conflict” is, perhaps an unusual term to use as an expression of concern for unity, for it is usually employed to describe a state of disunity, with two or more parties contending against each other, being engaged in conflict (cp 1Tim 6:12, 2Tim 4:7). Strong defines the Greek as “prop. a place of assembly (as if led) i.e. (by impl.) a contest (held there); fig. An effort or anxiety”. The ideas contained within this word, therefore, involve a gathering together (uniting?) for the purpose of engaging in, or witnessing a contest, or conflict, being led to that place by one party or another. And this is the case with the Colossians -, they were to contend against the Judaisers, who sought to “beguile” them “with enticing words” (Col 2:4), being led and encouraged in their conflict by the Apostle Paul. But in order to successfully resist these pervading philosophies, it was essential that the believers themselves be united upon the truths of the Gospel which they had been taught. So it was that the Apostle strove to exhort the believers to be united in battle.

But notice who it was that the Apostle strove for: “for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh”. Not simply for those at Colosse, or Laodicea which was relatively close - but all the believers, even those who he had never met, or even seen. The example here is most striking; it is easy to care about those who we know well, those we are close to, but the example of the Apostle is to “love the brotherhood” (1Pet 2:17), the greater part of whom we will never have met. Our concerns and strivings ought to be, that - even if it be only in a small way - we might contribute to the unity and general well-being of the whole body. The words of Paul are relevant here:

“... that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel” (Phil. 2:27).

### ***BEING KNIT TOGETHER IN LOVE***

The object for which the Apostle strove, was that the believers might be “knit together in love” (that is, bound together with “charity, which is the bond of perfectness” - 3:14):

“unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words” (Col 2:2-4)

Notice this - the loving unity of the brethren ought to be “unto ... “The full assurance”, or “entire confidence” of “understanding”, and an “acknowledgement” of the revealed mystery of God. In our day, there are many who exhort us to put aside differences in belief and doctrine, to simply be united in love. Love is the principal thing, they say - doctrine is secondary, and so long as we can show love, we can be united, tolerating each other’s differing “views” on doctrinal issues. But such was not the teaching of Paul. His exhortation, being “moved” by the Spirit, was that the basis of unity is “the riches of understanding” - a correct understanding of the things of Truth. And this he said, lest the believers be beguiled “with enticing words”, that is, that they might not be led astray by false teachers.

The primary problem facing the Colossians were the Judaisers, those men who sought to impose their mixture of the Mosaic Law and their traditions onto believers of the Gospel. These sought to “spoil” the brethren, “through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col 2:8), by seeking to bring them into bondage to the Law, which was but “a shadow of things to come” (v 17), and which our Lord “took out of the way” (v 14) by his death on the cross. But the Colossians were Gentiles. i.e. “to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles” (1:27). The mystery was the manner in which Gentiles would be given a hope of salvation, subsequent to the cutting off of the Jewish olive branches - previously hidden and unknown, but now revealed by the apostolic preaching. So it was that Paul exhorted the believers to be “knit together” in a mutual understanding of these things; “to the acknowledgement of the mystery”, now revealed, that being so united they might be able to stand against the inroads of the apostate Judaisers.

The principle being taught here, is that unity is the greatest defence for the household of faith. Our Lord taught that “every city or house divided against itself shall not stand” (Mat 12:25), and similarly, his Apostle exhorted: “if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (Gal 5:15). We truly live in “perilous times” (2Tim 3:1), and there is no time for there to be “wars and fightings” (Jas 4:1) amongst the members of Christ’s Ecclesia. Rather than to contend against one another, the body ought to be one “in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). The various members thereof ought to “exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any ... be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (Heb 3:13), rather than to devour one another through petty squabbles emanating from those who seek to exalt themselves above measure. To be united in a “full assurance” of the revealed things of Truth is just as needful in our day, as ever before that the faith may be earnestly contended for (Jude 3) in the face of false brethren who would seek to beguile us by the enticing words of the world’s philosophy.

This principle of being “knit together” directs our minds to consider the relationship between David and Jonathan. Immediately upon hearing the expression of David’s faith to Saul, Jonathan loved David very greatly:

“And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan *was knit with* the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (1 Sam. 18:1).

So far as we are aware, this occasion was the first time David and Jonathan were together. Yet it was following David’s victory over Goliath, the Philistine giant, that Jonathan loved him as his own soul. He found a kinship in David, they were joined together in a common purpose – to contend against the power of Sin, as vested in the Philistine host. This is the kind of faith that ought to unite true brethren in Messiah, in their earnest contention for the only true faith.

### ***THE TREASURES OF WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE***

The great and precious truths concerning how Gentiles might also obtain Salvation in Christ Jesus are styled by the Apostle, “riches” (Col 1:27, 2:2), or “treasures of wisdom and knowledge”, “hid” in the mystery of the Gospel, yet now revealed through preaching. Yet though the mystery was made manifest by the ministry of the apostles, the depth of those riches still remain unfathomable to the natural man. Hence the apostle exclaimed, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom 11:33). Yet those riches can be found out to the extent to which they are revealed, and to the measure of spirituality of those who seek them. It is true that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ... neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1Cor 2:14), but for those who have permitted the influence of The Word to transform their minds (Rom. 12:2) to become more in harmony with their Maker, who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern spiritual things, the riches of wisdom can be found by patient and diligent searching. So we read in the wise sayings of the Proverbs:

“if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of Yahweh, and find the knowledge of God. For Yahweh giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly” (Prov 2:3-7).

Notice here, how that wisdom, knowledge and understanding (cp Col 1:9) are said to be laid up (cp Col 1:5), not for anyone, but specifically for “the Righteous” - that is, for those who desire to forsake the

ways of the flesh to seek after them. And notice also, that the means by which Yahweh is said to give wisdom, is by imparting “knowledge and understanding” “out of his mouth” - that is to say, by His Word which he has caused to be made known and heard. So it is, that to obtain the hidden riches of wisdom, we need to search the word diligently, for so doing we shall obtain the gems of knowledge and understanding which are so necessary to direct our steps into a walk which is well pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

But how much effort is required to obtain such treasure? What is required of us to give? The Lord Jesus speaks of this parabolically, saying: “the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field” (Mat 13:44). Here the principle is given, that although a man may, through much searching “find” the treasure of the Kingdom of Heaven, he cannot partake of any benefit from it - unless he first forsakes the things of this life. We must sell all that we have - that is to say, we must give everything in order to obtain and partake of the treasures of wisdom. Only by ridding ourselves of the worldly things of this life, can we obtain the gems of Eternal life, and even having found, and obtained the Gospel treasure, we must keep searching diligently to find and obtain further hidden treasures, to learn the ways of wisdom.

From the day that the Gospel was preached to the Colossians, it grew within them to “bring forth fruit” (Col 1:6) to the Glory of God. They had a fervent love both for it, and also for others of like precious faith (1:4,8), seeking to edify one another in their zeal for the things of the Spirit. But trying times lay ahead, for “the mystery of iniquity” (2Thes 2:7), or the iniquitous influence of Apostasy had already begun in the days of the Apostle. Indeed, by the time of the Revelation to John, nearby Laodicea had already fallen into a nauseating condition of malaise (Rev 14:14-22), and other ecclesias were to follow. So it was that Paul exhorted the faithful at Colosse to continue in their zeal as they had begun: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving” (Col 2:6,7).

### ***BEING ROOTED AND BUILT UP***

The exhortation is to be both “rooted and built up”. Here, two figures are used together to illustrate a common point; the figure both of a plant, and of a building; a dual comparison also used elsewhere by the Spirit through Paul, “ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building” (1Cor 3:9). The believers remain “rooted” by remaining firmly grafted into the Israelitish rootstock (Rom 11:17), seeking to become securely anchored, obtaining their nourishment from the fertile soil of the word of God. Being well rooted, they are planted firmly, and well able to withstand the stormy trials which life brings, as the Proverb has it: “a man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved” (Prov 12:3), but shall rather in being nourished by spiritual things, shall blossom and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit (Prov 12:12, Gal 5:22) in all its various facets. And if believers are well-rooted in the things of God in this life, they shall receive due blessing by the Husbandman in the Age to Come, for it is written, “blessed is the man that trusteth in Yahweh, and whose hope Yahweh is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit” (Jer 17:7,8, cp Ps 1:3, Rev 22:2).

In addition to being “rooted”, the believers are to be “built up”. Interestingly in the Greek, the phrase is in the present tense - “being built up”, emphasising the point that it is a continual work. “The foundation of the apostles and prophets” has already been laid, “Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:20-22), and it remains for each individual member (as “living stones” - 1Pet 2:5) to edify and build one another up in the way of Truth, until the final completion of the house at the coming of the Lord (cp Zech 4:7-9). The Scriptural appeal to believers is to be active in “building up yourselves on your most holy faith” (Jude 20), being bound together as a single edifice, strong and secure under Divine protection. And again, the means by which believers might be so edified, is by the Word of God. Hence Paul said to the elders of Ephesus on his departure from them: “now, brethren, I commend to you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” (Acts 20:32). The Word of God then, is the basis of loving unity for believers; it is able to nourish those whose roots seek to sink deeply into it; it is able to build up those who seek to labour in the House of God, and it is able to strengthen us to withstand the philosophies of men, that we might grow more pleasing to our Heavenly Father. The exhortation remains therefore, that we, as the Colossians might be “rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17), that being securely planted in the house of God (Ps 92:13), we might be renewed with life, and flourish in the glorious age to come.

## *A WARNING*

The Apostle gave the warning:

“beware, lest any man spoil you through philosophy, and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him ...” (Col 2:8-10).

Here, the “rudiments” (or “principles” as the word is elsewhere rendered (Heb 5:12)) of the world” speak of the elementary principles of the Law upon which the then present order of things, or *kosmos*, was based. We read of these again in the Epistle to the Galatian ecclesia, speaking of Israelites under the Mosaic Schoolmaster:

“even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons ... Now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?” (Gal 4:3-9).

The turning back to the precepts of the Law, was a return to bondage; a bondage from which the Lord Jesus had provided redemption. And this was the danger which Paul warned the Colossians against - the Judaisers were seeking to turn the believers away from the Redemption of Christ, so bringing them into bondage to precepts which could only bring condemnation.

But in speaking of the “philosophy” of the Judaisers to the Colossians, the Apostle also speaks of their “vain deceit” and “the tradition of men” which indicates how that they were not simply seeking to bring the believers back under the things commanded by Moses, but also their own teachings which they had mingled with it. The Lord speaks of this, rebuking the Pharisees and Scribes for “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the command of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition ...” (Mark 7:8,9).

The Pharisees effectively negated the precepts of the Law by their traditions which had become superimposed onto it. In rejecting the spiritual principles revealed to Moses, their righteousness stood in the keeping of their own traditions, hence the apostle’s condemnation of it as “empty deceit”. As he wrote to the Galatians; that which the Judaisers sought to bring Christ’s brethren into bondage to, were “weak and beggarly elements”. Not that any elements of the Law were “weak and beggarly”, for they perfectly achieved what the Divine Lawgiver intended. But rather that the elementary principles upon which the order of things established by the Pharisees and the like, had become “weak and beggarly”, weakened and impoverished, devoid of any spiritual value by the subtraction of the Lord’s Truth, and the addition of the philosophies of man.

And how much like today’s religious scene this is! Truly history has repeated itself in the decline of Christendom to the degenerate state of corruptness and spiritual whoredom (Rev 17:5) which it is in today. Like the Pharisees of old, the leaders of modern churches have “rejected the commandment of God” that they may keep their own traditions: And this to the extent that what is presented to the people is likewise void of spiritual nourishment, being simply the humanistic sophistries of human wisdom which lead the hearers back into the bondage of sin:

“While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse than the beginning” (2 Pet 2:19:20).

So it is, that the principles of Paul’s warning apply to our generation just as they do to the Colossians, a warning which too few hearken to.

When we consider all of the above, we find the need to maintain a personal integrity in a day of evil. Those of like precious faith have the duty to strive together for the faith of the Gospel, being as united in love, as were David and Jonathan, the mighty warriors in Israel. We must seek the hid treasures of the Wisdom of God, and be devoted to building up the true ecclesia, eschewing the vain philosophies of man. Only then will it be granted to us, to enter into the kingdom promised from the foundation of the world.

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