

Paul's Expressions of Love for Christ's Church

By Joe Miller

Bible Text: Colossians 2:1-5

Preached on: Monday, October 22, 2012

You know, just listening to you praise our wonderful Savior with your voices and with your hearts, you know, it amazes me. No matter what church I attend and have the privilege of ministering in, there is always that occurrence where you hear someone, you attend for a while and they leave and they are just not happy with the church. Oh, it is not a loving church. They really didn't reach out to me. And I personally have the privilege of just closing my eyes and listening to the voices as you praise God with these wonderful hymns and praise songs that proclaim truth and how you can sit and experience the voices proclaiming the greatness of God and yet leave and say, "This isn't a good place." I don't quite understand how... what disconnect is there. I don't understand how you can come to a church where, for instance on Wednesday night, I don't know how many people were there on Wednesday, but you saw 68 boxes that were equipped and ready to be shipped out around the world somewhere to express the love of Christ to someone who is without. We have these wonderful people that help us with these various ministries that allow us not only to express God's love, but to experience it with one another. And yet, still, you hear the stories of how people just don't feel like they connect.

And it... to me I would say: Is it the body of Christ or is it the individual? Is there something that is getting in the way of them experiencing the love of Christ even though I will be the first one to admit that it is not going to be an infallible form of or a work in progress. But my experience here in the very little time that I have been here has been a really a wonderful, a wonderful unity in our appreciation as a body of who Christ is and his worthiness to be praised and the worthiness of his Word to be proclaimed.

So with that said, I am going to move on to my lesson this morning. And I am back in the prison epistles and this morning's title, Paul's expression of love for Christ's church and we are going to be in the first five verses of the second chapter of Colossians. And to start off I want to share this story.

There was a Methodist preacher and he was the senior pastor of the Westminster Central Hall Church in London, W. E. Sangster and he was part of the pastor search committee. They were looking for an associate pastor and a young man came to the committee one evening and this would be preacher told the search committee that he was shy and not a kind of person that would be able to, quote, set the Thames River on fire. And that is, I am not going to be the guy that is going to stir up the city.

And so Sangster thought about that statement made by this young would be pastor and he responded with this uncanny wisdom. He said, quote, "My dear young brother, I am not interested to know if you could set the Thames on fire. What I want to know is this. If I picked you up by the scruff of your neck and I dropped you into the Thames, would it at least sizzle?"

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And the point that is being made here is Sangster was looking for a quality of a man of God, a quality of a preacher of God's Word and a quality of a leader of Christ's Church. We are not looking for this cookie cutter form of what a shepherd would look like. We are looking for what God proclaims in his Word and we are trying to identify whether that to be manifested in this person's life. We are not necessarily looking for the most intelligent pastor and teacher. We are not necessarily looking for the most educated or the one with the greatest passion, the one that uses their hands more than the other, which I would probably win that one.

What we are looking for is a pastor and a shepherd, we are looking for elders, we are looking for Sunday school teachers, we are looking for moms and dads in their ministries with their children, those who have a great love for Christ, his Church, his Word and other believers. And I know that sounds somewhat cliché, but that is the fact. We are looking for individuals to have this love for Christ, for his Church, for his people and for his Word. I mean, no one can truly be an effective preacher and teacher and leader of the Church without having a passion won for Christ. If you don't have a passion for Christ and for his preeminence, if you have no desire to make more of him in your life and more of him in the life of your children and more of him in the life of how we praise him here, then you are not going to do very well in the ministry. You are just not, no matter how talented you might think you are.

And that is why besides the apostle Paul one of my great examples in ministry is the 17th century Puritan pastor whose name is Richard Baxter. His theme verse for his ministry is Acts 20. Turn to Acts 20. And as long as I am here—Lord willing for ever and ever—I know my children are saying that, that they fall in love with Tennessee and with their friends here—but as long as I am here this will be one of my key verses, Acts 20 verse 28.

“Pay careful attention to yourselves...”¹

That is very interesting. Pay attention to yourself. Examine yourself. Make sure that you are living the life that Christ has called you to live. But then he goes on.

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”²

And so there is a two fold marching order here. One, pastor, shepherd, elder, Sunday school teacher, Wednesday night teacher, pay close attention to how you are living. Are

¹ Acts 20:28.

² Ibid.

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you living close to the model of Christ? Because if you are not, you are not going to be able to oversee those who you have this greater responsibility for. Are you living close to the flame of Christ? And it is so important.

See, Dr. Sangster was looking for a man that could possess the same spiritual qualities found in the apostle Paul. Also Richard Baxter, a man that had this great passion for, again, Christ, his Word, his Church. It was said that George Whitefield while preaching in Edinburgh he was causing people, actually, to get up on Sunday mornings and actually want to go to the church. He sounds pretty familiar. I mean, that has been a while back since you have had Whitefield proclaiming God's Word and yet we still see this same burden, even for people that call themselves Christians to get themselves up in the morning to go to church. But yet there is a story told that once such man on his way to church where Whitefield was preaching he met this other man named David Hume. His a well known Scottish philosopher and a real skeptic of the Church. And so this man was surprised meeting David Hume on his way to hear Whitefield preach.

He said, "Hey, I thought you didn't believe in the gospel."

To which David Hume responded, "I don't, but I believe Whitefield and I believe that he does."

And his point is this. Are we living lives that... yeah, I believe in the gospel. And yet it is this... none of the hope, none of the help of the gospel is reflected in your lives. But it wasn't Whitefield's life and because of that it was contagious. And I am not a big fan of lifestyle evangelism, because I just don't necessarily want people to look at the outside, but look at the inside. But in this case, if there is a passion that you see coming out of this church, if there is a passion you experience as we are worshipping God together, man, we need to stand up and take notice of that. But we also have to have others see that, too.

You know, God forbid that people would leave this church without us pointing out, yeah, we have some weaknesses here, but, man, look at the strengths. And one of the greatest strengths of this church is Christ preeminent in his Word proclaimed. Man, if you have that as your top one and two, everything will fall into place. It just takes a matter of time. That is my encouragement to you all to have this Pauline, this Baxter's sort of heart attitude about our church.

2 Corinthians chapter three and verse two Paul said this to the Corinthian believers, "You are a letter of recommendation to me, of me. The way in which you live your life is a reflection of how I have ministered to you."

The way in which we live outside of these walls here is a reflection of how pastor Dave and his ministry here and the elders and their leadership here, our Sunday school teachers, our children's leaders. And yet many in the Colossian church they are reading

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this letter coming from Paul in prison and yet they have never seen nor actually heard his voice. That is an amazing truth here. Yes, Paul was the founder. Paul is the apostle. Paul is the one overseeing this church and yet Paul and those within the Colossian Church they did not necessarily meet personally one another and yet in this circumstance you see this letter being sent and yet it would be very easy for someone to read this letter and misinterpret it, but yet Paul does well to explain his heart here. I don't want you to misunderstand what I am saying. I want you to understand this and first and foremost. Christ is preeminent. His Word must be proclaimed. And there are those now in the midst of you called Gnostics that are trying to rewrite and to reeducate and to reinstruct what has been taught.

So he is writing this letter as a means of a push back to these false teachers that are within the church.

2 Timothy chapter two and verse 10 Paul tells those willing:

“Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect.”³

This is Paul. He is saying, “I endure everything for you.”

“...that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”⁴

This is Paul's heart attitude. It is also reflected here in this letter. It is here in this section of Paul's letter to the Colossian church. Chapter two is probably by far the most personal part of this letter. He is expressing his great personal love for them. You are dear to me. you are my children. And so he is writing this letter for the sake of expressing four different expressions of his love for the Church so that they might be as an example on which to compare then our own love for one another, our own love for the church here. This letter is actually quite practical for us. Do we see these various points that are going to be discussed expressed here in our own body at Calvary Bible Church.

Our first point, Paul's heartache for Christ's Church in verse one. He says this:

“For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face.”⁵

Again, Paul is writing this letter. He is writing not just to the Colossian church, but all those churches in the Lycus Valley. There are various churches there. And it was Paul's desire for them to truly know how much he once labored for them, how much he has been

³ 2 Timothy 2:10.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Colossians 2:1.

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suffering for them on their behalf. And it is not the... he is not trying to get brownie points here, folks. He is really not trying not draw attention to himself. But what he is trying to do is he is trying to say, "You are so valued, not because of some sort of heart attitude that has been established in me, but this heart attitude, it finds itself in Christ. This is the love that I have for you, first found in Christ and now that I have also for his beloved."

And so he goes and he says, "I have this heartache." And part of the heartache is knowing that there are Gnostics, there are these false teachers that have infiltrated itself into the Church and their false teaching. And so he says this in verse one. "I have this great struggle." And this is where we get that Greek word for agony, *αγων* (ag-one'). It is defined as a struggle, a fight to contain something. It also defined as a race ran with intent.

Back in Colossians chapter one and verse 29 Paul uses the same word to speak of his striving, his agony in ministry. And so he has this agony for the saints in Colosse. It is the same kind of agony that word agony comes from the origin of when the actual Olympic games started. And it finds its footing or its foundation in the fact that those that participated in the Olympic games these are individuals that agonized as they wrestled. They agonized as they ran these foot races. They fought. They agonized to win. And here Paul is expressing this same agony, this same purposeful intent to labor, to protect, to comfort, to love. He was using every ounce of his strength and passion for the glory of Christ and for the protection of his Church. And yet how many times do you, Sunday school teacher, praise team participant, food prep person, adult ministries, children's ministry, nursery ministry, did you come sort of prepared? At times have you been late and just sort of prepared?

This is not the kind of heart attitude that Christ wants us to have for Christ's Church, not ours, but Christ's Church. It is the real deal. It is go time. There is no more important institution on the face of the earth than the local church. And so when we are called to ministry be serious about it. Come prepared for it. When we are going to do a short term mission trip, when we are going to do a men's ministry retreat or a women's ministry retreat or a Wednesday night program, come with your goods. Come with your game face on, ready to agonize. But the agony doesn't start when you get in your car to drive here. The agony started six days before. Be thoughtful.

This letter is nothing but thoughtfulness. I mean, truly it is divine. I mean, the truths and the heart that you see in this letter from Paul, inspired by the Spirit of God but with the intent of reflecting a heart that says Christ's Church is worthy to suffer and to agonize, not to just wing it, guys. We are not called to wing it. We are called to give it its best.

How can we give it our best? Our best is exactly that, best, not so good. But a heart that

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has been spiritually regenerated, a heart that now has the ability to express agape love can do wonderful things, amazing things with Christ's people.

So here you have Paul knowing that his spiritual children are being attacked by these false teachers. His heart is just aching for them.

I remember one time I was in Russia. It was one of my first trips to Russia and Tara was not able to go this time, because she was pregnant with our first child Hunter. And in Russia you could get internet access, but you would have to drive into town and it was snail speed. I mean, dial up, literally dial up. And it was about halfway through my stint in Russia during that time and I went into town with a friend to check my email and I get this email from Tara saying that she has had some premature bleeding. And that was it. I am like, that is all. You know, I am pretty mature. I lost a baby... anything. I mean, just premature bleeding. And I am, you know, first time dad. You know, I am looking at him right now and about ready to go down. My boy. And for the rest of the time there I couldn't leave. But it was agony. I mean I just agonized. I was calling my dad. I had a satellite phone. I was calling my dad. I want you to get the who, what, when, where and how of this, because I can't get a hold of her.

It was just an amazing time that it is the closest picture that I have of just agonizing to be with someone and here is Paul in prison. He can't be here. And yet he realizes that there are these Gnostics in the Church. There is goofiness going on. He wants to be there and say, "You guys, you are no good. And let me tell you why. You need to go bye, bye. You need to leave." You can't do that. The only way he could do that is he had Epaphras and Epaphras can, you know, bring this letter and he can communicate his heart. Agony.

When was the last time you agonized over your children's salvation? When was the last time you agonized over someone in your Sunday school that you know probably, maybe is not saved and yet you would love for them to come to that saving relationship? When was the last time you agonized for your next door neighbor?

Yet Paul here in first century, 18 centuries later William Carey. Carey used to carry around this leather globe, you know, prior to the plastic globes that we see all over the place, this leather globe of the world and he used to pray for the lost all the time. And this is part of him going into India. And yet it would be the same man who had this leather globe that would eventually be, man, the father of cross cultural ministry, the founder of modern missions. He agonized with this globe to proclaim through his prayers seeing the gospel spread throughout the lands.

So Paul because of his heart for God's people he uses this letter and he sends his side kick, Epaphras to deliver this letter that speaks of his agony. He loved Christ's Church.

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He was willing to struggle and to agonize for it. This is the recipe for the love that Christ, that Paul had and the heartache for his spiritual children.

2 Corinthians chapter one and verse eight Paul reveals this same heart attitude for the Corinthian church.

“For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.”⁶

And yet Paul, as you go on and continue to read that letter he is like, “But I am ok with that, because of who my Savior is, who my Lord is and who you are. I am willing to take the hit. I am willing to experience this burden.”

That word burden there it describes here in 2 Corinthians chapter one the idea of a beast of burden, an animal that works out in the field and they have fallen. They can't get back up, because the load was just so heavy. I have experienced that, not literally in a physical, but in an emotional way, that there was a burden that I had for my wife. There was a burden that I had for my unborn son. And it was beyond my ability to carry it. thank goodness for a close friend who was with me and a Savior that never leaves me.

This is how Paul felt about his church throughout Asia. And here he realized just not here I the Colossian church, but the Corinthian church, I mean, Paul... good grief. I mean, I get frustrated and I struggle just with doing ministry with one local church. And yet he has multiple churches here. The agony and the burden and yet he never gave up. He never acted in a way in which forsook the Church or Christ. He agonized.

Colossians chapter four. Let's turn over a couple of pages, verse 12. Here Paul giving his final greetings and he says:

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.”⁷

Willing to agonize. Here Paul just expresses this enlarged heart for the Church, his love for Christ, his love for his children. His love for the Word, willing to agonize. It is these kinds of big hearts that within the Church will experience the greatest joy because when you were agonizing in ministry that means you are having to draw close to Christ. You are having to realize this strength is not your own, his ability is not your own, his provision and not your own. And when you see the Word of God take a hold of

⁶ 2 Corinthians 1:8.

⁷ Colossians 4:12.

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someone's life and to see the Church move forward, there is this joy of knowing it wasn't I, it was Christ. And this is the kind of attitude that wants to continue to hold on to here at Calvary Bible Church. Every elder, every pastor, every Sunday school teacher, every children's ministry teacher, music ministry, youth ministry that we are compelled to possess this kind of heart that wants to agonize with people. If you have that desire to want to agonize get the lives of people involved in their junk, i.e., their sin and to help them put it off and put it on, or do you just... the thought of getting involved in someone's life is just painful for you. It just tires you out.

Honestly, folks, I think most people within the church when they think about getting involved with somebody else's life it is just that is too tiring. I can't even think about doing that. I am so overwhelmed myself, I can't even think about getting involved in somebody else's life. And so we forsake that person and we focus more on just getting our own lives together. We are not going to agonize for anybody else. We are just going to agonize over our own selfish interests. And yet you have Paul who presents this selfless heartache for Christ's Church.

Second point, Paul's desire for the Church. I think spiritual wise believers will always be known to have the specific keys, their spiritual health in order, their spiritual hope in order and having a spiritual joy. And all of this is... finds its increase as your heart, your spiritual hear, your knowledge of God and your focus on Christ becomes just singularly the only thing that you value. But when we live in a world that is constantly vying for attention and we sort of parse out our heart into pieces a little bit for my family, a little bit for the... my work, a little bit for my hobbies, a little bit for, you know, my entertainment, a little bit for Christ, then we are not going to be singly focused.

See, Paul's desire is that his spiritual children in this church here would have this one solid heart focus on Christ and him being preeminent. C. S. Lewis a few months before he would go home to be with the Lord, he wrote back to a little girl that sent him a letter and he said this, quote, "Dear Ruth, many thanks for your kind letter. It was very good of you to write and to tell me how much you love my books. And what a very good letter you did write for your age. Now if you continue to love Jesus more and more, nothing much can go wrong with you and I hope that you always do so."

Writing to a little child, he made one point. Love Christ more. Make it your intention to love him more. Put yourself in the way with people that will help you love Christ more. Get involved in someone's life that you see is very passionate. No matter how goofy they might be, all right? No matter how many quirks they might have, but if they are passionate about... get involved with them. Find out how that can be something that you can adopt in your life. Find out what they did.

Most likely, not even most likely, I know for a fact it is going to be through the Word and through praise and through prayer and through the Spirit of God. That is how that

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happened. If it happened any other way, then you need to run to that person. It is all just a emotions not based off of Christ. But find those that are passionate and hook up with them. It is contagious. And if we are going to be contagious about something, let's not be contagious about things that really don't matter within the Church, the issues of preference and pride. Let's get passionate. Let's be contagious about our love for Christ and his Word and about seeing people transformed. If we are going to be infected by any thing, let's choose the right thing to be infected by, not the wrong thing. Let's choose the thing that is going to cause Calvary Bible Church to make an impact in Nashville.

See, what you and I think of Christ, how we understand him, our vision for Christ will shape our entire life. What we will believe about Christ will determine how we live in the here and the now and how we will be able to worship and to present Christ with these great gifts in eternity.

And so the question that I want to present to you is: How does the knowledge of Christ and an intimate personal relationship, how does that take place? I mean, I know some of you are like... {?} Word of God, you study that. You know, you come to church. You listen to a sermon. You do Wednesday night. You do some quiet time. You do some praying.

I think part of that is true. Part of the answer is yes, a faithful, passionate, love for God's Word, a study of it on a consistent manner where you are not only studying it but through the empowerment of the Spirit of God you are seeing it applied to your life in that put on, put off process is taking place. Wrong thinking put off, right thinking, Christ, found it in his Word today, putting that on and thinking that way.

But it is not just you learning. Here is where I think a great disconnect, especially in churches that we are very like minded with. A big disconnect is: I get this. I don't know it all, trust me. But I get this. {?} So my concern needs to be but do you get it? {?} Amen, brother. But do you get it?

You know, most of us have a pretty deep and wide knowledge of this Word, but the question is: Not that you get it, are you allowing and helping others to get it? Are you investing in them? This is Paul's desire for the Church. I want to be there. And so here in verse two—go back to Colossians two and verse two—he says, “I haven't seen you face to face. Some of you I haven't met before. You have never heard my voice before.” But he is saying that, “My desire is that your heart's may be encouraged.”

Do you get encouragement from one another? If you are not, man, if you have not been encouraged by the person next to you, just turn to them and encourage them. And maybe they will return it. Are we encouraging one another? That idea is that παρακαλεω (par-ak-al-eh'-o) where are you coming along side someone and saying, “Not only do I get this, but let me show you how. Let me show you why. Let me show you what the Word

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of God has done in my life and my relationship with my wife, with my children, with my best friend Robert {?}.” My best friend here in Nashville is Robert {?}.

Robert and I have been having a few problems lately, but by the grace of God he brings to very strong willed people together into a room and all those things just end up disappearing, don't they, Robert?

You come alongside one another. I think for many people they are uncomfortable with that. But, folks, that is sin. {?} is a sin. Unwillingness to invest, having a fear of man instead of fearing God, having a greater love for your own comfort instead of wanting to come alongside and comfort others, even though I might feel a little weird. I don't know exactly if I am going to do this right. That is why you have the Word of God. That is why you have the Spirit of God. And if you don't feel like you are going to do it right, go get some help and bring them along with you. But we have to get involved in people's lives.

I have another good friend here Dave Hoffman and he is constantly reminding me when are we going to get together. And shame on me, soon. But thank you for chasing me. Sometimes we say I shouldn't have to chase anybody. Sure we should. Christ is constantly chasing us.

William Barclay provides for us this example of παρακαλεω (par-ak-al-eh'-o) meaning the idea of encouraging and strengthening another from this Greek classic story. There was a Greek regiment that had lost heart. It was utterly depressed. The general sent a leader to talk to the regiment with the purpose of doing this. You will strengthen them so that you can provide them with courage that can cause them to be reborn, that can cause them to have this new spirit which will enable them to become fit again for what? Heroic action.

What is part of my responsibility and your responsibility to one another. That we come alongside and we encourage each person, one another to the right and to the left. Encourage you to heroic action, not selfish, self centered action, heroic action. Put yourself out on the line. Put your feelings and your just being uncomfortable out of the line of the cause of Christ, for heroic action. It was Paul's prayer that the Church may be strengthened with the courage that will enable them not only to cope with any situation they might face, but to truly do heroic things for Christ.

Back in verse two Paul expresses this idea that their hearts may be encouraged, they may be strengthened. And it is not just referring to emotion. Do you know what? Folks, there is godly, biblically based emotions and then there is ungodly and self centered based emotions. We are talking about these godly emotions. But there is also this physical result that produces this great emotional stress. When you are agonizing for someone, when you have this great concern for someone, when you know that someone is struggling with some sort of habitual sin issue and you know you need to sit down with

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them and have that conversation, the physical emotion is called butterflies in the stomach, right? If I ask anyone, ok, you... next person that drives by, just step in front of the car. Tell them to roll down their window and show the gospel.

First of all, you are going to be like, yeah, no. And second of all you are going to be like, I have these butterflies in my stomach. That is part of our emotion. When God puts us out on a line, when we have to trust him more than trusting ourselves. It is that battle that we have, but we have to put heroic action. We have to do these things.

Paul uses this wonderful word. Of all the words in Scripture this has to be one of my top five, this word heart or in this case hearts, which refers to that inner person, that the center of a person's life. It equates to the person's mind that their mind, their heart, their new inner man, that they may be encouraged, that they might be strengthened.

Jeremiah 17 and verse nine.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”⁸

The psalmist in Psalm 53 and verse one:

“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”⁹

But in the new, regenerated follower of Christ they now have the mind of Christ. They are pursuing the mind of Christ. They have the spirit of God. And that this where we make our decisions. That is what rules and guides us. Matthew 6:31. That this where our treasure lies.

So the way we control our emotions is through this new heart which directs the way that we think, directs our decisions and directs how we interact with other people. Proverbs four and verse 23 encourages us daily.

“Keep your heart with all vigilance.”¹⁰

Protect it. Put a hedge of protection around it. Why?

“...for from it flow the springs of life.”¹¹

If it gets infected what you do on the outward will be infected.

⁸ Jeremiah 17:9.

⁹ Psalm 53:1.

¹⁰ Proverbs 4:23.

¹¹ Ibid.

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Joey {?} had the privilege of reading Psalm 139, the last two verses of that.

Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!¹²

The idea here is we need to keep a hedge of protection around our heart to make sure that the things that we are focused on are Christ centric, Christ proclaimed, making more of Christ, because when we have that heart attitude, it is going to be far easier for me to come up and say, "I know this and let me show you what I know. I heard that you are struggling, because your husband has been away for three weeks. How can we come alongside of you?"

Three weeks without having her husband. There are those in here that married, maybe divorced, wondering is that it? Is that the rest that life has for me? That is all down hill from there? No. I am not married yet. Never been married yet. Is that it? Am I never going to get married? I don't know. Maybe not. But what we should actually be thinking about is: *Deo volente*, God's will be done and find actual true... not this... you know, when people say, "Oh, yeah, God's will be done," But when they are thinking about something that God might do that was against their will they are like, ok, God's will be done. It has to be God's will done. And say it in such a way where, yes, that is a good thing. God's will be done, because his will is always what? Perfect. It is not a mistake. God is not going to choose the wrong answer. God is not going to take you down the wrong path. It is going to be the perfect path, the glorious one, the one that is ideal, especially for him. It is going to bring him pleasure. It is going to bring him glory, but it is also going to be perfect for you. You have to think beyond our own conditions. That is why we have to have a heart that desires him.

Ephesians chapter three and verse 16.

"...that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being."¹³

That God will give you the wisdom and the power, the conviction to do the things that he would have you do. Jesus told the disciples, John 14 and verse six, or actually 16 that he is going to bring a helper, the Holy Spirit. Look. We have a παρακαλεω (par-ak-al-eh'-o). We have an encourager. We have a strengthener. We have everything that we need to live a life of godliness, a life that will glorify and please him. And yet why do we find ourselves not living that kind of life?

¹² Psalm 139:23-24.

¹³ Ephesians 3:16.

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By Joe Miller

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And yet you have Paul through individuals like Epaphras, even Timothy. 1 Thessalonians chapter three and verse two. I am sending you Thessalonians believers to establish, to exhort, to strengthen your faith.

In Acts 15 and verse 41 Paul went through serious Cilicia, he was strengthening the churches. God has sent pastor Dave, John Parker, Joey Basham, Mr. Binkley, Mr. Allen, Mr. Hoffman and myself to do exactly that. God has appointed Sunday school teachers and laborers to do just that here in the Church. That through us collectively we can minister to one another effectively and if we do that, there is absolutely no way outside of a person's wrong perception could they leave this church and say, "I wasn't loved here." It would be impossible.

Look back at verse two. Paul had another desire for the Colossian Church.

"...that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love."¹⁴

What kind of love? Agape love, superior love, divine love, which is biblically based, biblically understood. See, agape person doesn't run off of just unhinged, senseless emotion, these uncontrolled passions that actually directed and guided, but at the same time we can have these moments, these seasons in our life where we know so much of the Word of God, but it is just this dead intellect. Yeah, I know how to parse that verb. I know the importance of an aorist tense, but I can have this dead intellect and this doctrine that might be spot on, but yet Paul warns us if it lacks agape love, 1 Corinthians 13, it gains nothing, folks.

And so if people are here and we have this great wisdom, but they are walking out of here not experiencing the love of Christ that is expressed through us, then we need to reevaluate. Why does Paul spend so much time on this? He said this back in verse two. His desire is that the Colossian church, those individuals would be encouraged by being knit together in love. I love that. That is a wonderful picture, knitting together in love. God is knitting us together.

When was the last time you felt the ... I don't know, the cold prickly knitting things that you do, you know? The last time you felt like you were being twisted around someone's body to make a, you know, a tight knot? I mean, when was the last time you allowed yourself to just be rubbed up against someone, to be fastened closely with someone, to be knit together? I mean I love that. That is... of every privilege that I have in ministry, to be able to just sit down and have a passionate conversation about God and his Word and his people and his Church. I mean, I get paid to do that, folks. And I had opportunity to sit down with Dave and sit down with Robert, even Zack. I mean, we have met a couple

¹⁴ Colossians 2:2.

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of times and just like our time flies by. It flies by where it is like, oh, two and a half hours? Really, ok. Well, I missed that appointment. I mean and those are good problems to have because there is a unique relationship that believers have with one another that no one else in the world can have. You can go to Russia and never meet someone and sit down that night and have the sweetest fellowship you have ever experienced over watermelon and slicing up some cheese and meat. And there is {?}. You are like, I don't understand a word you are saying, but, brother, I get you. There is something supernatural about that.

But that idea here where Paul says that your hearts may be encouraged being knit together in love, this word knit together it is that idea of being united and brought together. And this verb explains the main verb, that idea that you may be encouraged, pointing out that the courage or the strength in Christian heart, those will be the ones that are knit together in agape love. But in order to be knit together, folks, you have to allow yourself to be manipulated, meaning you have to allow yourself to be used by God. You have to allow yourself to be used in the life of someone else. But if you live in isolation, you are not going to be effectively used.

Unity in the Church is not organizational. A lot of people, well, you know, we have go get organization down here. Well, yeah, you do need to get organization down a little bit here. But that is not where we are going to thrive. Where we are going to thrive is focusing on the fact that Christ, Christ preeminent, his Spirit supernaturally working throughout this church, throughout each individual, being willing to participate in heroic action.

You know what? It takes courage to try, folks. It takes courage to say, "I don't know if I am going to be able to effectively minister to his person, but I am going to step into their lives. It takes courage to be heroic and we find our courage in Christ. Galatians chapter three and verse 28. There is this wonderful truth. The idea that we are all one in Christ. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that we would be one in Christ. We are called to be knit together in love, to have this common spiritual heart and mind attitude that encourages one another. Francis Schaeffer describes this testimony. If we are a church that people see we are knitted together, this idea that, you know, if I take my arm, I just twist it around Zack and we are just sort of like this. They are going to see that and say, "That is really weird, but that is sort of cool, too." When they see us so tightly connected with one another, instead of having this, you know, big church where you can sort of hide in the corners and as soon as someone says amen you just sort of sneak out. That is not the way it is supposed to be, folks.

Schaeffer said that when Jesus was speaking about this unity in John 13 the idea where he washed the feet of his disciples. Jesus points out that if an individual Christian does not show love towards one another, towards another Christian, the world has no right to judge that this person is a Christian, but if he does, then they should say, wow, there is

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something different about this person. In John 17 in the Lord's prayer Schaeffer goes on. He says, "Jesus states something else which is even more and more cutting and more and more profound, quote, 'We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son and that Jesus' claims are true and that Christianity is true and that the Church is the real deal unless the world sees the reality of oneness and unity within that church.'"

Good grief, spot on. We could preach all day long, but if there is not a oneness, a unity, a love for Christ, then, of course, people are going to walk out and say, "Later. I am going not try the church down the street." And they would be doing it for the right reasons.

So what is the key to true unity? Ephesians chapter four and verse three.

"...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."¹⁵

Setting aside of personal preferences and loving one another, desiring to live at peace with one another. This will be evidenced. Colossians chapter three and verse 12.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.¹⁶

This is the interaction. This is the play that takes place here. When we feel like someone has slighted us, man, get it over with. Let's have the meeting. Look at the glory that comes from that. Don't let the sun fall on your anger and yet we do. We don't just let one day fall. We let weeks and months go before we even address it. And you get that far down the road then it really gets difficult, folks. It gets hard to deal with these issues and to bring true unity together.

We are knit together in love. We are expressing the supernatural love to one another and people will see that. They will see that.

I am almost done here, folks. Look at the middle of verse two. It says if you are going to be knit together in love, and for what reason? Paul speaking to Colossian believers to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mercy which is in Christ. And this was also Paul's desire for his spiritual children, that all of the riches, that full assurance of salvation might be experienced by his spiritual children. Folks, if you are not assured of your salvation, if you don't have this eternal life assurance, you cannot experience joy. You are constantly going to be burdened by if I messed up today do I have to go back and get right with God again?

¹⁵ Ephesians 3:21.

¹⁶ Colossians 3:12-13.

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How can you look forward with hope to the blessings of heaven when you are constantly wondering if you are even going to get in. That is one of the great burdens that I had for students, for teens in Russia where there was this prolific teaching about the fact that you can lose your salvation. And that was such a burden for teens. No matter what camp I went to, no matter what time that I spent with them, that was their number one question. Explain to me why we are wrong and you are right when you say we are eternally secure. And think about that burden. Think about that cloud that would just hang over you every time you knew that you had sinned.

When we experience true spiritual understanding and that is what we are talking about here, this full assurance of spiritual understanding, we experience it by living it, by applying, studying God's Word and by applying it, living it out. And as a result of that we have this not only assurance of salvation which is proclaimed in that word, but we also find ourselves, because of that assurance, finding this solid footing, this strength of heart, these works that find themselves making a heroic impact into the lives of others. We find ourselves even more deeply convicted of our relationship with Christ.

I have a few more points here, but I am going to jump to my conclusion. Trusting that the Lord will surely allow me to come back to you {?}. What am I trying to communicate here? I am trying to communicate the experiences that I have had in the various churches that I have had opportunity to minister in and also to be ministered to. It would be very easy for us to find ourselves so singularly focused on our knowledge. And that knowledge begins to puff up and that knowledge actually at times while it is supposed to bring us together to be tightly knit, it actually causes us to find separation, to not find unity because it is a knowledge which is possessed of the wrong heart attitude. It is a knowledge that was self centered, established with this idea of vain glory that we do things not based on serving Christ, denying self and serving others, but for establishing out of a preference, a comfortableness in our life which says if it doesn't happen this way, I am not going to be comfortable with it and therefore we have to change it in order to be comfortable with it.

We were at a bonfire on Friday night with teens and it was interesting some of the conversations that teens bring up. I mean, they just shoot it out, you know? They have no problems bringing the tough issue to bear in conversations. And one of the questions was, you know, what do we do with people that are just strange and different in our lives? We love them. {?} I mean we love them. We agonize with them. We invest in them. We expose them to the Word of God. We come alongside them παρακαλεω (par-ak-al-eh'-o). We disciple them. We invest time in them.

It is not for us to decide how they are to be changed. It is for us to come alongside and at least be a means and a method in which God can change them. But sometimes we just get so particular into who, what, when, where, why and how ministry that we find

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ourselves not doing anything. And if we do choose to do something, we just become so specific on how it needs to be that, you know, sometimes we end up alienating the people around us that we need to help serve.

But I think if we could put on this heartache that Paul had for the Colossian church, if we can adopt his desire for it, this would result in a unity that is not just based on relationship. It is based upon truth. It is based on the supernatural transformation of the heart to the spirit of God and the Word of God. It is based on a unity that is not based off of our own preferences and our own desires and our own wants, but it is based off Christ who is centric in everything, that when people walk into this congregation, when they hear us worship, when they hear our prayers, when they hear our preaching, and when they see us interacting after the service, that they leave here saying, "I witnessed people treasuring one another." I witnessed people of different race, colors, creeds and preferences and yet finding themselves coming together because of the oneness in Christ, because of the truth of God's Word, setting aside their preferences and preferring Christ and others above themselves.

Paul not being able to come to the people that he so dearly loved and yet I think this comes from a verse from ... I think Wesley wrote this here. It is part of a verse and the hymn escapes me, but one of you is going to get it. "Thou, oh Christ, are all I want, more than all in thee I find." When we get to the point of being able to realize it is not about us. It is not about our preferences. It is not about how much we are sacrificing. It is not about how much I have been alienated. It is not about how much I spent money or the resources or the time. It is about other people. It is about Christ being glorified, being exemplified, being praised in how we invest in other people.

When we are there, we get to that point and whenever we are running in all eight, folks. We are not there yet. And I think we would all admit that. We are not there yet. Individually, corporately, we are not there yet. But this is our process. This is where we are going. This is where we want to be. But it does take you saying, "Guess what? I have something I want to share with you." {?} It is a choice, folks. It is choice and I would pray and I would hope that we would start making those choices, that we would not live in isolation, but that we would live in the midst of one another. Not necessarily in groups, where I really love the groups and home Bible studies, but, man, get involved in people's lives, one on one. That is where great change takes place there, great relationships are established there. And they last into eternity.

Let us pray.

Father, thank you for your Word. Father, your Word has so much to say and yet to this speaker he finds himself lacking the ability to communicate what you have so perfectly communicated in your inerrant and infallible and inspired Word. Yet, Father, there is so much there. You don't place little nuggets. You place blocks of gold in every verse. And,

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Father, it is my prayer that of the blocks of gold that have been presented to your people here, that they would indeed go back with a nugget that they could value as being precious, applying it to their lives this week. Father, help us as a church to grow more and more knit together in that agape love and that unity in the bonds of peace, Father. But that love is an action. It takes our action. It takes our desire to deny self, to deny preferences and to exemplify you in everything that we do. Father, thank for your Word.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to the teaching ministry of Calvary Bible Church in Joelton, Tennessee. For more information on Calvary Bible Church or for more audio, please visit our website at CBCTN.ORG.