

Knowing Jesus: The best way to recognize a lie is to know the truth

Colossians 2:1-8

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If you go online and type in “How to recognize when someone is lying”, there are many websites that give you advice. Some will tell you how to read someone’s body language. Their eyes, their posture, their hand gestures, the position of their head, and so many more. One sight actually gave 34 behaviors to look for. Other websites will tell you which verbal/oral cues to watch for. Change in volume, change in voice tone, too many words, not enough words, repeated words, inconsistent details, too many details, not enough details, talking too much, talking to little, and on and on. Others will even give you tips on how to ask questions that will catch people in their lies. It sounds quite complicated, but the question is the same that the Apostle Paul is writing into in the book of Colossians. How do we recognize the truth? In today’s verses we will see that **the best way to recognize a lie is to know the truth.**

As we study Colossians 2:1-8 we must remember that the Apostle Paul is writing from a Roman prison cell to a young church in the city of Colossae, which was located many kilometers away, in modern day Turkey. The people in the church in Colossae were new in the faith and already false teachers had come into their church and were seeking to lead them away from a correct understanding of the Christian faith and Christ. These verses are part of Paul’s effort to help these young believers learn how to recognize the truth and turn away from false teaching.

¹ 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,

It is interesting that the Greek word for **struggling** is “ἀγῶνα”, pronounced *agōna*. It is where we get the word “agony”. It was originally an athletic or military term of struggle, or conflict. It was using all your strength, consuming all your emotions and even your last breath to win the game or even the battle. This verse gives us a picture of Paul’s love for the church and God’s people. He had never met them, but they were Christ’s so that meant they were family. The believers in Colossae were Paul’s spiritual grandchildren. They had been brought to Christ by Epaphras, and Epaphras had been brought to Christ through the ministry of Paul. They were sheep among wolves, young believers among false teachers. Paul was the one who could rush in and protect them, yet he was in Rome, in prison. He must have felt helpless, like he could do nothing. That was the source of his agonizing struggle.

We find this same Greek word, “*agōna*” in Colossians 4:12. This verse reveals how Paul was choosing to struggle on behalf of those in Colossae and Laodicea: ***“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."

Besides writing this letter, Paul's inability to go in person now drove him to struggle and agonize on behalf of the Colossians, Laodiceans, and the others in prayer. It was through agonizing prayer and faith that Paul now struggled on behalf of the people. It was not his last option, but his first option that he was left with.

We must remember, as Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:12, ***"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."***

Paul was wrestling in prayer because Paul's ultimate battle was not against the false teachers in Colossae, it was against the spiritual forces of evil. We, too, must remember where the true battle is being waged, and who it is against. It is not against those who treat us badly or have drastically different beliefs and values than we do. If we are drawn into the lower conflicts of this world, we will choose to wage war on those who are not our ultimate enemies. Yes, we are sinned against and we sin against others at times, but there is something greater happening in the unseen spiritual world. That is where Paul was waging battle and where we must wage battle as well. This is how we are to usher the kingdom of God into the lives and the situations around us. Prayer is our greatest tool in this spiritual battle. Prayer ushers in the work of the Holy Spirit and He alone can bring the victory. So whether the need is across the street or around the world, whether you can be there in person or not, prayer is where we start and where we end as we agonize and struggle on behalf of the needs of others.

Paul was struggling for them, but why? Verse 2 makes that clear:

² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

The heart is the center of who we are as people. It is the seat of our desire, our emotions, our will and our worship. Proverbs 4:23 says, ***"Guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life."*** When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus said, ***"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."*** Without God our hearts are darkened and wicked, but with Christ our hearts are transformed for obedience and godliness. Whatever rules our heart will determine our words, thoughts and actions. Because of this Paul agonizes in prayer that their hearts would be encouraged in the midst of their difficulties.

The Greek word for "encourage" is from the same root as "*paracletos*", the word that is used to refer to the Holy Spirit who would come to be our Helper. It was also commonly used in the Roman Legal system. The idea of defense lawyer came from this word. This word for "encourage" means to comfort and to exhort. It was the idea of speaking to someone in such a way that even in the midst of difficulties they would be stirred to confidence and courage.

The story is told of a Greek regiment which had become fearful and lost heart. The general sent one of his officers to "*paraklein*" or encourage them. He spoke with such inspiration that when he was done their spirits were lifted and they were fit once again for heroic action. That is the meaning of this word. This is one of the purposes of Paul's agonizing in prayer for the people in Colossae. That the Spirit would work in their hearts in such a way that they would gain the courage needed to face the difficulties that had come against them.

This encouraging of their hearts would come from the Holy Spirit. Similar to what we find in Ephesians 3:16, ***“That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.”*** As the Colossians continued to yield to the Spirit of God and the Word of God on a daily basis, they would receive all that the Spirit had for them.

Paul also desired that their hearts would be ***“knit together in love”***. In Paul’s writing this idea is often symbolized by talking of the physical body.

Ephesians 4:16 says, ***“From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”***

In 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 Paul writes, ***“That there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”***

Paul’s first desire is that individual hearts be encouraged. The second is that they be knit together in love. Both together lay the groundwork, set the stage, build the environment, so that they will be ready take hold of ***“all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”***

Assurance grows in the midst of hearts that have been encouraged by the Spirit and nurtured in loving, Christ-like community. Here we experience the practical workings of the gospel and grow to be convinced of the love of Christ as we experience it with others. Here we see the benefits and riches that are gained from being fully grounded and assured in one’s understanding and knowledge of Christ. But it is not only the understanding and knowledge about Christ. This divine “knowing” is found in Christ, Himself. As we discussed before, the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, now lives and works in every believer. It is as the Word of God is worked into our lives by the Spirit of God, in the context of the people of God, that we become intimately acquainted with the Truth, Christ, and are prepared to recognize and stand against false teaching.

This is the peaceful confidence and biblical safeguards that one has when they clearly understand the gospel and all its ramifications for life. One discovers the riches of full assurance when they have a thorough knowledge of Christ through study, as well as coming to know Christ intimately through life experience. They no longer are led away to doubt or heresy when a non-believer with persuasive arguments speaks. They no longer struggle with obedience when faced with the teachings of scripture. Full assurance in the gospel brings freedom, rest, and faster and deeper growth in one’s spiritual life.

Those without Christ have no access to the treasures which only can be seen as the Spirit leads a believer into all truth. As one comes to Christ and grows in assurance of faith, it is like looking at life through new lenses and seeing true beauty for the first time.

A few months ago, during the confinement, I was at home and stumbled across these videos on Youtube that were showing people who were colorblind. In each video they were receiving a gift, a box with special glasses that would allow them to see color for the first time. In one it was a wife giving it to her husband. In another it was a gift among friends, but the one that really caught my attention was the video of an extended family at Christmas. They were all in the living room together and the moment came to give Grandpa his Christmas gift. They all knew what it was. It was a pair of special glasses that would finally allow grandpa to see colors for the first time.

They gave him the box and he slowly opened it. He took out the glasses, not really sure why he was receiving them. He then put them on and began to squint and slowly look around the room. He was overcome. The Christmas tree. The lights. The decorations. The family. And then sitting on the sofa he just began to weep. They were bittersweet tears of disbelief, of finding a treasure that had been hidden for so long. The family gathered around their grandfather who now finely could see the beauty of the world around him.

Christ does the same for us. The truths of the gospel are the lens through which we should view everything. As Christians, the truth of the Gospel has now become the core reality of our lives. The gospel is not only a Sunday topic at church or the focus of a few minutes of devotional reading at night. It is the permanent lens with which we view everything. It might work something like this . . .

We bring ourselves back to the gospel at the beginning of every day. As we think about it we are humbled by our sin, our sinfulness and our brokenness. Pride is swept away and we no longer think more highly of ourselves than we ought. As Jesus instructs us to do in Matthew 7, we first take note of the log of sin in our own eye before we judge the speck in someone else's eye. As we once again have been reminded of the "bad news" of the gospel, we then are lifted up with the "good news" of the gospel. We have been forgiven. We are loved. We have been adopted. We are secure. Christ is in us and we are in Him. We no longer have to earn love or perform for the approval of man. We can stand strong, even in the most difficult or external circumstances, because our strength, our joy, our hope and our peace now come from within. We are in Christ. Our Father treasures us, cares for us, provides for us and loves us. We are now secure . . . So, we no longer need to devour each other, or put others down to raise ourselves up, or brag about what we have done so everyone knows, or be broken if we don't succeed in some earthly endeavor. Our lives are built upon the rock, and though storms may come and floods may rise, we are held firm on the foundation of Christ.

In Christ we are given the tools to fight temptation. In Christ we can find contentment. In Christ we are given a heart of thankfulness. In Christ priorities are made clear. In Christ change is possible. In Christ we are loved unconditionally. Christ is our true reality. It is a relationship with Christ that, like the color-blind grandfather, finally shows us the truth of the world around us and changes everything.

Without Christ all of this had been hidden. It could not be seen. It was available to all, but only those who came to Christ could take hold of it. It was this daily relationship with the Truth that would be their protection against false teachings. Paul continues . . .

⁴ I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Paul was writing to protect them from people with persuasive power who could seek to sway them from the truth. He just reminds them that they are not alone in their struggle. He rejoices that even in the midst of their struggles they remain in good order and firmness in the faith. Both of "order" and "firmness" were military words. The word for "order" referred to having every person in their appointed place. As they played their God-given and God-gifted part in the life of the church, they would be better prepared to fend off attacks of the evil one.

A well-ordered congregation would result in this word "firmness" that referred to solid protection and brought to the readers' mind a picture of an immovable phalanx prepared for the enemies' attack. It was

crucial that each person play their role. As the people of the church were united, *“knit together in love”*, the church would be prepared to fend off attack.

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

At salvation the gospel introduces certain truths into our lives. These truths are not merely useful for salvation. They are also given to help us live the Christian life.

In the same way that faith brought you into salvation, faith will carry you through your Christian life as you trust in God’s provision, promises and faithfulness.

In the same way that God drew us to Himself in salvation, so will He continue to draw us to Himself as He grants conviction of sin, desire for God’s Word, compassion for other believers, and a heart that loves God and loves others.

In the same way that one’s salvation depends solely on the work of Christ, so too, does one’s sanctification depend on the work of Christ in our lives. In our weakness He is strong. Reliance on God’s grace, not our own works, will continue to empower our Christian life.

In the same way that confession and forgiveness ushered you into salvation, so too, does confession and forgiveness guard your intimacy with Christ each day of your Christian life.

In the same way that unconditional love laid the foundation for your salvation, so too, does unconditional love hold you securely throughout the ups and downs of your Christian life (Romans 8:31-39).

In the same way that dying-to-self brought you into salvation, so too, does dying-to-self lead you into submission to Christ and a continued love of neighbor.

In the same way that your new identity ushered you into the family of Christ, so will your new identity be your security and righteousness in your Christian life. It frees you from the need to fear man and allows you to walk in holiness in agreement with your new nature.

The same sovereign God of the gospel who coordinated the centuries, the events, the prophecies and the details that led to Christ’s coming . . . The same sovereign God who coordinated the events that drew you to faith in Jesus Christ (John 6:44) . . . is the same sovereign God who can be trusted as we face the challenges and decisions every day of our Christian lives.

In summary, in Christ, through faith, we have everything that we need to live the Christian life. It is not Christ plus extra hidden knowledge as the gnostics were saying. It is not Christ plus Jewish rituals as the Judaizers were saying. It is not even Christ plus remnants of the pagan religions from which some of the new believers had come. It is Christ. He alone, nothing more and nothing less, is sufficient to save.

In faith we are to be rooted in Christ like a tree which sends its roots meters and meters into the ground for water, nutrients and stability. We are also to be built up in him like a house that has been built on a strong foundation. After all we find in Christ, our attitude should be one of gratitude for all He has done. Paul goes on to say . . .

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

Paul then returns to His main concern. Paul is exhorting them to be intentional, not accidental. Purposefully protect yourself, be attentive, keep your guard up. Make sure that no one takes you captive, spiritually lures you away and takes you where you do not want to go, by philosophy and empty deceit.

The false teaching was appealing to the elemental spirits of the world that were in contradiction to teachings of Christ. You might say the false teaching appealed to the base desires and human logic. We still see much of that today. Imagine you are listening to a sermon on Youtube. How do we know if it is trustworthy preaching? Here are several questions that will show you when it is not. Is it using God to selfishly help you get what you want, or is it teaching us to live our life for God's purposes and God's glory, even if that calls us to die-to-self and to sacrifice? Is it claiming that we can do it in our own power, or is it leading us to rely fully on the work of God in our lives? Is it using scripture as its basis, or is it relying more on the ideas of man? Is it moving us towards greater dependence on Christ, or to rely on ourselves and our own religious works and will power? Does it help us remember our sinfulness and His grace, or does it teach that we are good and we just need to think more positively about ourselves?

Christ is our only hope for salvation. Without Him no one is good. It is in Christ that we have been redeemed, made new, and been made righteous. If a teacher talks of what we need to do to earn salvation in our own works, will power, religious ritual or strict living, we know we are not listening to a teacher who can be trusted. Jesus alone is our hope for both salvation and righteous living. That is the mystery of the gospel. When we were dead in our sin and hopelessly separated from God, Jesus came and did what we could not do for ourselves. He lived a perfect life and died on the cross for our sins. He took upon Himself the sinfulness of man and paid our penalty, so that through faith we could be forgiven and reconciled to God. Salvation is not about who we are and what we have done. It is about who Christ is and what He has done.

So, today, what will we do to fortify ourselves against false teaching? Come to know Christ more. Pray that the Spirit will encourage our hearts. Take intentional steps to grow in love with other believers in the church. Make time for the Spirit to work in your life through God's Word as you read alone and study with others.

Discussion questions:

1. What from this sermon did you find most interesting?
2. What do you look for when you are trying to see if someone is telling the truth or not?
3. Can you think of a time when you could nothing else but pray for someone?
4. Can you remember a time that you were down and defeated and needed the Spirit to encourage your heart?
5. How would you describe a church that is "*knit together in love*"?
6. Knowing the truth of Christ helps us avoid the false teachings about Him. How can we come to know Christ more?
7. What do you think you need to remember from this sermon?
8. What do you think God wants you to do because of that?
9. How can we help you with that?