

Knowledge, Wisdom, And Understanding Need Commitment

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[0 : 00] You want just to stand for a moment while we bow our heads and let me pray.

Our God, we have witnessed the baptism of a child into the Church of Christ. And we recognize that Paul, in writing to the Colossians, says that you have transferred us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of your dear Son.

Now, we're very familiar with the kingdom of darkness, and we want to be very familiar with the kingdom of your dear Son. So help us as we read your word, that the kingdom may be illuminated, and we may recognize it in our midst.

We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Now, the passage that we're looking at this morning is Colossians 2, verses 1 to 7, and it's found on page 188 in your Pew Bible, and that would, I think, be a considerable help to you if you were to turn to that.

And it would be a considerable help to me if you would allow me to read it again to you, putting a little background in it. Paul is in prison, in Rome, a long way away from the Church to whom he is writing this letter.

[1 : 44] He is writing to people whom he has never seen in his life. He expresses a longing to see them, but a longing which was never to be fulfilled.

And so what he wants to do is impart to them something which, if he were there in person, he would delight to impart to them. But though he is separated by time and space, he nevertheless can impart it to them.

And I want you to hear this in the sense that we have never seen Paul face to face. I keep thinking of John Chapman and his, you know, the high school students who said, Did you ever see God?

And he says, I would if I'd been on time. Well, you know, I guess the same applies to St. Paul. Well, we weren't on time, but he longs to see us.

And he longs, I mean, he was in agony about this Church. He looked at the Church in Colossae and he agonized over it. And he saw what was happening in it.

[3 : 00] He saw the vitality of their genuine faith in Christ. And he saw the thing that was eroding and corrupting it. And he was very anxious to help them through that struggle.

And with this anxiety on his mind and heart, he writes in chapter 2, verse 1 to 6, and says, I want you to know how greatly I strive for you.

And the word is agony. For you and for all those at Laodicea. For all who have not seen my face.

Then let me read verse 5 because it picks up on that thought. 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.

So, though he is separated from them by time and space, he's with them in spirit.

[4 : 0 6] And he's very much aware of where they are and the battle that they're fighting. So, he says this to them in order, look back to verse 2, that their hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery of Christ.

Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And then this in brackets.

I say this in order that no one may delude you with beguiling speech. And then verse 6 and 7, he concludes this section.

As you have received Christ Jesus, so live in him, rooted and built up in him, established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

One of the key words in this passage, I think, is to know, knowledge, wisdom, understanding. I want you to know the mystery of God.

[5 : 2 6] I want you to understand. I want you to search for the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I want you to know about me. I know about you.

I want you to know about Jesus. So, knowing is a kind of theme that runs throughout. Now, in order that you might understand that, let me tell you that not long after I had come to this parish some 10 years ago, one of the great ladies of Shaughnessy told me, on the basis of her experience of life and raising a family, that the greatest tragedy in this world since the war has been the invention of the pill.

Well, I took it that she knew what she was talking about. And it just was one of those things that struck me and that you don't forget. When you think about it, you see what contraception does for us.

It may have many uses, but it also has many abuses. And what it does is it allows you to know somebody without being committed to that person, to know in the biblical sense of sexual relationships, knowledge without commitment.

And I think that's what she was saying, was the great tragedy. And I thought that was profoundly wise. Now, you see what happens as the result of that.

[7 : 1 3] And one of the things that I think is a characteristic of our age is that we suspect that there is such a thing as a contraceptive, a kind of spiritual contraceptive, if you can handle this for a moment, which makes it possible for us to know God without being committed to God.

And we suspect that we can do that. I don't think Paul even began to conceive of that possibility. I might say that only Stephen James would pick up on that right away.

But what, what, you see, what he's talking about when he talks about knowledge is that to know somebody means to be intimately related to somebody.

To know something means to be intimately related to that something. That you cannot know God without being related to him. And one of the great problems of the society in which we live is everybody thinks they know God, though they have no relationship nor commitment to him.

And that's why I want you to have that in mind so that you can hear what Paul is saying to the Colossians. And what he's saying to them comes, I think, really in five verses.

[8 : 5 4] And the first thing he's talking about is how I, Paul, know you, the congregation at Colossae.

He says, I long for you, in verse one. I want to know how you are. I want to know about those who have never seen me face to face. I want to know how people in the adjoining city to you are.

I agonize for them. I want them to get really straight on what God has revealed of himself so that we can know him in Jesus Christ.

Paul says, I really want to know you. Now, I'm not St. Paul, but I think I recognize some of that longing. The longing to be able to sit down face to face with people and talk to them.

To talk to them about Jesus Christ. And this church has become too big for that in lots of ways. It can't happen. Just as Paul's had become infinitely too big for him.

[10 : 00] Lots of people had heard and responded to the gospel who never saw Paul face to face. They never sat down and talked to him. And Paul makes a surprising remark.

He says, I know what it would like to be with you. I am with you in spirit. I feel what you feel. I experience what you experience. I relate to those you relate to.

I know the kind of opposition and conflict you're in the midst of. I am right with you in my mind. And spirit. That's what he says in verse 5, you see.

That has been overcome in one sense. But Paul will never see them face to face. He will never relate to them person to person. It won't happen.

Even though he longs that it should happen, it won't happen. And I think that that's all right. I think it's all right because Paul recognizes that they don't need to know him.

[11 : 18] But they do need to know Jesus Christ. And so he goes on to tell them about that. And when he goes on to tell them about that, look at verse 2.

What he tells them about that. The necessary precondition of knowing Jesus Christ. He says, is that your hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery of Christ.

Hearts knit together. God's fundamental way, I mean part of God's fundamental way of revealing himself to us in Christ is to knit our hearts together.

God has to do his knitting. Now I often meet lots of Christians who have become seriously unraveled.

You know. And they very badly need to be knit together. When you take seriously becoming a member of the church, we recognize that the thing that has to happen to you is that your heart needs to be encouraged and you need to be knit together.

[12 : 42] And the work of God is to do that knitting. You know, that you might be joined together one to another. That you might not become unraveled or be just a kind of loose string of wool Christian.

But that you will be knit together. And the reason that it's necessary to be knit together is that knowledge and knitting belong together.

In other words, the reason that you go into a group and relate to other people is because together you can come to a knowledge of God. You can't separate those two things.

You must be knit together one with another in order that you together may receive the knowledge of God. The New Testament doesn't talk about holy men sitting on mountains contemplating the ultimate mystery of the universe.

The New Testament sees people closely knit together, encouraging one another, and coming to know God with one another, teaching mutually one another.

[14 : 00] And that's how God does his work, by knitting people together in relationship to one another. A relationship which is based on the fact that they share a common knowledge of God which God has revealed in Christ.

Look back at the verse again and see what I'm talking about. Their hearts are encouraged, they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and knowledge of God's mystery of Christ.

The true relationship which exists among people is because of their relationship, of the relationship that they bear to one another. It's as we are encouraged and knit together that we are able to receive the knowledge of God.

You see how the idea that I started with, that there is no knowledge of God apart from commitment. We receive this child into the body of Christ's church, that being knit into the body of this church, she may grow in the knowledge of God.

Those two things go together. We need to belong one to another. And when you as a Christian become unraveled, you need to go to somebody with a large darning needle who will knit you back in to the fellowship of Christ's church.

[15 : 29] The third thing that happened, and this goes on, to talk about your relationship to Paul, which is circumscribed by time and space and is an inadequate relationship, how God compensates for that by knitting you together into a fellowship one with another so that you may come to know God.

And then verse three tells you how you come to know God. In Christ, you see, and in Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Well, what he's saying here, and this is a preposterous statement, that in Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

in the mystery of who God is, that mystery which God has made known to us in Christ. Remember that in connection with religion, mystery belonged to the, you know, that the mysteries were revealed to the initiated.

The uninitiated didn't know what it was all about. But when Paul picks up the idea of mystery in the New Testament, he is saying to us, the mystery of who God is, is in Christ.

[16 : 53] And when you come to know Christ, you solve the mystery, the mystery of who God is. You see, you can't know him apart from commitment to him.

And in the commitment which comes with your being knit together into the body of Christ, you come to know who God is. And in Christ, God has hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Now, the people of Israel had a vast storehouse of wisdom in the Psalms and in the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and all through the writings of the Old Testament.

They had this vast storehouse of wisdom and knowledge. And the key to that is in Christ. In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Now, you know, one young friend of mine the other day after last Sunday's sermon said to me, how do you make this work in the work-a-day world?

[18 : 08] You know, how do you take in Christ or hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge? knowledge. And I want to suggest to you that the problem is that in the work-a-day world, we have separated knowledge from relationship.

So that, you know, we live in a world where all the things we work with and all the people we work with are objectified. and we don't have any real relationship to them.

That's the kind of world we live in. And all knowledge is objective so that, you know, what you know doesn't affect who you are. And you know that lovely picture from, that Walker Percy tells about in his Guide to the Universe or something like that.

He talks about the man that the great Californian scientist who was the head of the team that took a space probe and sent it to the planet Uranus on a journey of five years.

And this space probe landed within five minutes of the time that was predicted, within feet of the place that was predicted five years before.

[19 : 29] And this brilliant man who was at the basis of this, he said, is the most spaced out man in the whole of California, if not the world. So that, you know, that what is characteristic of our society is people with a tremendous amount of knowledge but who don't even know how to relate to tying their shoes.

And that, that kind of reality is there. And that's why, why, you know, when, when Paul says that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, he's not seeing knowledge as we see it, something which is objective and a part and that we can store in banks of computers, he's seeing knowledge as a relationship that very much involves who we are.

And we have to relate to what we know. And, of course, that's one of the key problems of our society. And Paul puts his finger on it and he says, there is one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and that one is Christ.

Well, then, he goes on and in verse 4 tells you what the danger of this whole program is. Look at verse 4 of chapter 2.

I say this in order that no one may delude you with beguiling speech. Once you become a Christian, you become very susceptible. And almost anybody can lead you astray and almost everybody tries to.

[20 : 57] And, you, you, you lose your grasp on what is at the heart of it. And somebody takes your new spiritual susceptibility and takes advantages of you by what Dick Lucas calls fast-talking feeble-mindedness.

That, he deludes people into thinking something is true which is not true. And so, people get drawn away. And Paul says, you've got to watch out for that.

That's what can happen to you. And you have to be very hard-nosed about it. But then he goes on and says, you know, that the danger is the clever lie.

But then in verses 6 and 7, he summarizes the whole thing by saying, look at verse 6 and 7, as therefore you receive Christ Jesus, the Lord, and, you know, the people who work hard at things like that say you can say, and this is a unique statement in the whole of the New Testament, Jesus Christ is Lord, Jesus, Jesus is Christ, all those are in that, as therefore you have received Jesus as Lord, you have received Jesus as Christ, that's what you've done, therefore live in him.

now, you know, the difference is, you know, we live in a world of tourists, you know, where everybody has been to Asia, Africa, Australia, and every place else.

[22 : 37] We've been there, and we've seen it. We've seen, you know, native people dancing, we've seen their religious rituals, we've seen all sorts of things about them, we've seen different cultures and different societies and different languages, and we've seen all those things, and always we've stayed back from them.

We don't want to get infected by them, contaminated by them, we bring our own drinking water and eat our own food, because we don't want it, we don't, well, you see, it's that kind of tourist Christianity in which you look at the phenomena of religion, but you don't want to get infected by it.

And lots of people sit in the pews of a Sunday morning who are scared to death of being infected. Well, what Paul is saying, when you see Christ and Christ's people, that's what you're to do.

You're to eat what they eat, drink what they drink, relate to them, live with them, sleep with them, die with them, share the whole of their life together. You know, you don't draw back like a tourist and say, well, goodbye, we're off to the nearest Sheraton.

that's not what happens. You say, these are the people that God has given to me, and I give myself to them, and I want to share their life.

[23 : 59] As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him. That's your new life. And you have to give up your old life in order to take that life on.

And that's, of course, what Paul is talking about here. And the way you take it on, he uses a kind of mixed metaphor. He says, rooted in Christ Jesus, like something that grows, and built up in Christ Jesus, like something we built.

Something grows spontaneously, but it's built by planning and commitment and so on. It's like all you had to do downtown was put in a foundation and just wait for it to grow into a 40-story building.

It doesn't happen that way. Nor can you take all the parts and make a carrot. That doesn't happen that way either. But he mixes both these and he says you're to be rooted in Christ so that you grow.

You're to be edified or built up and defended in your convictions so that you understand what it means to be a Christian, to be rooted and built up in Christ.

[25 : 08] Christ. And then he says that that happens to you as you are established in the faith. And that's not in faith but in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

That's the particular faith he's talking about. Not a general term of faith as something we do but it's faith in Christ Jesus and that you are taught and that the evidence of all this is that you abound in thanksgiving.

Rooted, built up in, established, taught, and then you know what it's all about and you give thanks to God that he has brought you into a relationship with him in which you know one another because you are knit together.

You know God because he has revealed himself in the mystery of Christ. you know that you will be subject to false teachers and that these people to whom God has introduced you and into whom he wants to knit you and encourage you or weld you into that those are the people to whom you belong and their lifestyle is the lifestyle which is to characterize you because their lifestyle is to be characterized by being rooted in Christ built up in Christ established in the faith taught and that what happens to you then is that you find that you are a thanksgiving person.

you may find it hard to give thanks for the weather in Vancouver but I got a letter from John Chapman this week and he said he got safely home to Sydney and the day after he went they had the tail end of a cyclone and in four days they had a year's supply of rain he said it made my days in Vancouver seem like seven years of drought well God has called us into this relationship with one another with God in Christ as as the anointed one of God and as the Lord of our lives and our business is that our lives may be shaped to that new belonging as we are rooted built up established taught and that our lives pour forth with thanksgiving

[27 : 54] Amen in a moment we're going to sing our offertory hymn but why don't we just pause for a moment just have a moment silence to reflect on our response to what we've heard and then we'll sing a wonderful hymn of praise just a moment silence just as we reflect on what we're going to do from what we've heard and can it be that I should gain an interest in the death of Jesus Christ that's our hymn that we're going to sing now it's our offertory hymn 138 we stand to sing a whole an voice a a hear a a know in a a a

How can we be the love of your name? I give the mercy of the Savior's love.

I give the meaning of this day. I give the meaning of the heaven of the earth.

How can we be the love of your name? I give the meaning of the love of your name?

I give the meaning of the earth. I give the meaning of the love of your name.

[29 : 57] I give the meaning of the love of your name. I give the meaning of the love of your name.

I give the meaning of the love of your name. I give the meaning of the love of your name.

I give the meaning of the love of your name. I give the meaning of the love of your name.

I give the meaning of the love of your name.