

Unity in Love and Truth

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[0 : 00] athletics in his own day and the famous games that took place in that region and he uses that frequently in his epistles. Athletics, wrestling, boxing, all of these energetic activities he finds very useful in order to apply them as illustrations of different aspects of the Christian life.

Philippians 3 verse 13, remember they're thinking about straining ahead to the things that lay ahead and the imagery there is of the athlete coming to the final finishing stretch, reaching forward to press himself through the tape in order to achieve the goal and you'll find the same thing here in verse 29 of the first chapter where you find him using the words struggling and then in the first verse of chapter 2 he uses the word struggle so the verb is there in verse 29 the noun struggle in chapter 2 verse 1 and that's all to do with the effort that he is putting into the work that he's doing as an apostle as a servant of Christ not just for these Christians in Colossae but also others for whom he has a burden and responsibility and so that is repeated you can find yourselves different passages that have similar sentiments 1 Timothy chapter 6 verse 12 where he talks there in 2 Timothy 4 verse 7 speaking of himself there as somebody who's coming to the end of his course I have kept I fought the good fight I have kept the faith and so on you'll find the same in Luke chapter 13 where you find there an emphasis on on that same sort of imagery Luke 13 at verse 24 where you find words that are similar to the apostle just to show that they're not just confined to the apostle Luke 13 and verse 24 where you find the Lord saying someone said to him Lord will those who are saved be few and he said to them strive to enter through the narrow door so you find the same imagery there make every effort put all your energy into getting through the narrow door into the kingdom of God into salvation and then when you go to Colossians chapter 4 you find verse 12 there very similarly to what you have here in verse 2 in chapter 2 chapter 4 verse 12 where we read that Epaphras who is one of you a servant of Christ Jesus greets you always struggling on your behalf in his prayers and he's not saying they're struggling in prayer in terms of not really being able to pray it's not struggle in that sense though some of us very much are aware of that struggle there just means exactly the same as chapter 2 verse 1 here this energetic effort putting his effort into this he's really struggling in prayer he's putting everything into his prayer the effort he puts into his prayers for them and it's not surprising you find all of these emphases especially in Colossians here because this is a letter written to a church that were really having problems with false teaching and false teachers who were facing the kind of false teaching about salvation that said to them look Christ is not enough you need something more than Jesus you need more than the righteousness that's in Christ you need something more than what the apostle Paul taught that we are justified through faith in Christ that everything we require is there in Christ as the provision of God and that's where you find all of these kinds of references throughout Colossians to false teaching using words probably borrowed from the false teachers themselves who had an idea that

Christ was not enough and you needed to build up different layers of experience and initiation rights until you came to know God at last and of course that's how they themselves saw themselves they were the means by which people were led by them so they thought into a proper knowledge of God and Paul is saying don't listen to that put that away from you everything that you already need that you need has already been given to you it's all in Christ Jesus as we'll see he mentions here that deposited in him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and of course that sort of teaching that sort of false teaching is very unsettling heresy is always unsettling false teaching is always discouraging to congregations discouraging unsettling to Christians which is why you find combined here not only the sufficiency of Christ but the unity of God's people in Christ and it's a unity first of all in love and in the truth and we'll see in these first few verses one to three how both of these aspects in relation to unity are so important it's unity in love and in truth not just in love or not just in truth it's unity in love and truth as these are inseparably connected together in the scheme of God in the Christians experience so let's look at that first of all unity in love and in the truth and you notice this word encouraged I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for those who have not seen me face to face and some take the view that Paul had never met the Colossians there's no record of him in the New Testament having been at Colossae or having established the the work in Colossae others take a different view but there's no record of him having been there in any case he's saying those have not seen me face to face I include them that their hearts may be encouraged the purpose and aim of the apostles struggle for them and I'm sure he means struggle in the sense of

Epaphras's struggle in chapter four and in prayer as well all the effort that he's expending on their behalf and remembering them and praying for them and writing this to them that it's all directed to this that they might be encouraged that their hearts may be encouraged and the word encouraged there is a word that's very very similar indeed the same root as the words in the New Testament in John especially John's gospel for the Holy Spirit who is the encourager the comforter the person who comes alongside literally means to come alongside and speak to us to encourage us so encouragement really in the New Testament sense of it is something that has both comfort and fortification you get comfort through the ministry of the gospel but you get fortification you are fortified through it as well you're strengthened and all of that's built into what Paul is saying this is why I have this great struggle for you so that their hearts may be encouraged you cannot look at any or read anything from the apostle in terms such as these and fallen with those who thought that Paul was a very distant character that he was a very harsh character the modern representations of Paul would see him as somebody who was really pretty much a formalist kind of character he was just interested in theology giving out these great schemes of theology and all these letters that have all this theology in them but really was he somebody who could get close to was it somebody who was genuinely interested in people's well-being yes he was this is no cold distant formalist this is a man who wants to get alongside people this is a man who really seeks to understand where they're at what they're suffering why they're suffering what they need in terms of teaching advice guidance support now of course a great challenge to ourselves because from this passage itself you can actually just detect the warmth and the heart of the apostle for these Christians at Colossae and it reminds ourselves that whatever we place we give to theology and we give theology or should be giving to theology a very important foundational place in our thinking we have to have along with that this genuine warmth of affection and concern and prayerfulness and struggle for people to develop in their faith to grow in their faith to have their lives built up in God's truth so he's first of all saying it's to encourage them that they may be encouraged but then he says being knit together in love so it's for encouragement but also connected with that is that they are knit together in love in other words this is the unity that he's now introducing the unity of God's people the unity of these Christians and Colossae and in that unity they must face the heretics in that unity they must see to it that as they grow in grace and as they grow in knowledge as they grow in understanding so they're growing also in closeness and in regard to each other because that's how they must face the heretics that they must face the false teaching that wants to just take them away from everything being already for them in Christ knit together in love this is no mere outward organized religion all is certainly organized and wants people to be organized he's commanding them as we see in the later part here rejoicing to see your your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ

Paul is not about everything just being done loosely or casually or just come what may and people just following their own inclinations no he has to have an order to his theology and an order to his Christian life and an order to the congregation is writing to and that's an important facet of being Christians together in this world our unity is not a disordered organization it is an ordered unity it's having things in the right place as God himself specified or leads and you could follow that point out yourselves but it's crucial that we see here this unity that he's speaking of being knit together is being knit together in love in love there is in fact no proper unity without love without Christian love because without Christian love unity breaks down or isn't really there at all in any meaningful sense but being knit together closely bound together in love love is is crucial to our unity see what he's saying in chapter 3 and verse 14 if you uh just cast your mind forward to that he's saying put on in verse 12 as chosen ones God's chosen one put on he's talking here the language of clothing yourselves put on holy put on kindness put on humility put on meekness put on patience bearing with one another and if anyone has a complaint against another forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you and above all these put on love in other words he's saying these are the spiritual garments you put on as

[12:04] Christians and there's a garment over and above all of them that really keeps them all together that keeps them from being dissipated or losing their effectiveness what is that garment that binds everything together in perfect harmony it is love the love that's patterned on the love of God the love of Christ himself so being knit together in love so you see the way the the argument is proceeding I'm struggling for you I have this great energetic struggle for you and it's so that your hearts may be encouraged and so that they'll be encouraged being knit together in love and then what what is the objective what is he then saying all of this unity and of this uh of of this um struggle that he has for them that they be encouraged it's so that they will reach all the riches of fuller of full assurance of understanding of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery which is in Christ what a packed phrase I mean you'd need more than remaining 10-15 minutes to even unpack um the main parts of that he's talking here about God's mystery which is in Christ and when Paul speaks about mystery in this sense he always speaks about things which were hidden in the old testament days or all the way through or partly or mostly hidden but now have been revealed the mystery of salvation the wonderful truth of salvation which in part was revealed in the old testament but waited until the coming of Christ the fullness of God's revelation in him has now been revealed and he says this is what my struggle is for you and for those in Laodicea that being knitted together in love to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery which is in Christ God's revealed truth in Christ and you see he's saying here they are deposited in Christ um in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge doesn't mean here hidden in the sense of not not not seen at all or absolutely hidden out of view what he means I think he's borrowing again the language of of um of these mystics of these false teachers who themselves were saying well we can show you the mysteries we can show you the hidden mysteries you need to follow our directions before you can come into knowing about God and knowing about salvation and Paul is saying that's all deposited in Christ already and they are hidden in the sense of deposited already in him it's all there in him it's been essentially revealed by God now that's an important point in itself because there are no essential truths from God out with Christ there are no essential truths from God that are to do with

God's salvation out with Christ Christ has himself he is himself the place where the wisdom where the mystery where the treasure of wisdom or knowledge and knowledge are already deposited God's salvation salvation in Christ he's saying to them this is what you need this is all you need this is really the complete Christ and you are complete in him remember that remember that when other groups in today's world will tell you you know you you people are very backward you should really add this or add that add speaking in tongues add this that and the other to what you already experienced you've got something already yes that's good but you need to add other things before you can go further in your spiritual experience no the apostle is saying the bible is saying you already have everything in Christ you already have the holy spirit in you if you're a believer and when you have the holy spirit in you and you have the these treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Christ there is no essential truth out with that it's all there for you already that's why the struggle that he has in prayer for them is that they'll come to the full assurance and understanding of all of these things of the gospel and of the salvation that is in Christ now you see how love and unity in the truth are combined together unity involves both love and truth love for God and love for each other and truth that is to say the truth that God has revealed in the gospel and we need to keep these together in the gospel and we need to keep these together because love needs to be given structure for it to be love in the biblical sense and what is it that gives love structure it is the truth of God if you detach love or the idea of love from the from the Bible from the truth of God you've no longer got a structure to your love and love needs a structure and has a structure to it because it's come it is it is the love that God is revealing to us that that Christians are to have for him and for one another it's love that's embedded in the truth of God the truth is foundational truth to it and that structure and purpose is given by the truth of God in other words if you go by Paul's by by Paul's teaching here if you go by the whole of the Bible essentially it actually demolishes this daft idea that you have in the world today that love is love what is that saying it's not really saying very much because love then is up to yourself how you define it the structure that you give it is really nothing more than your own idea of what love is and even if it's the most debauched thing in the teaching of the Bible and you call it love love is love is what we're told well that of course is nonsense there is no structure to that there is no basis to that nothing living to that except people's own wishful thinking and all people's own prejudices or predilections love is love only when it is love in the truth and love of the truth and love structured by the truth and sadly our world and I'm not excluding aspects of the church in our world no longer hold to this wonderful wonderful teaching of the Bible that love is as God himself defines it or else it ceases to be love in that true sense the ideology love is love is really love based on my truth my idea of truth what I make truth to be for myself

and that's just hopeless it leads to despair it leads to lifestyles that are simply completely out of control at times and certainly out of sync with the Bible's teaching so friends there is love and truth together and unity in love and in truth which is what we ourselves prize not just unity for its own sake but unity in love a unity which begins in the heart or which issues from the heart in love and a love which is structured by the truth of God and has substance to it because of that but secondly verse 4 briefly look at what he says here this I say in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments now he's been speaking of a unity in love and in the truth and now he's moving to something connected to that unity threatened by plausible arguments

I am writing this to you in order that no one may delude you and that really means to be deceived to be deluded or even to be self-deceived because very often false teaching is very persuasive and that's why he's calling here the misleading of the mind the mind being actually led away from what it should be focused on me saying being deluded with plausible arguments heresy can be very very plausible and those who present heresy to us can have very very plausible ways of doing it they can sometimes sadly be much more friendly than genuine Christians trying to represent the truth as it is in Christ but plausible arguments are no substitute for knowing the truth not that the truth need to be seen as an implausible or impossible to set it forth as a plausible argument what he's saying is there is such a thing in heresy such a thing in untruth such a thing in false teaching as plausible arguments because error is so often appealing and it's designed to catch the mind that's why verse 7 there is so crucial you see what he's saying there in verse 7 as you received Christ Jesus so walk in him rooted and built up in him and established in the faith just as you were taught he's saying there there's the faith there's the truth of God you are established you're built up in the faith that's your foundation the truth of God and so on the basis of that you walk you live out your life you conduct yourself and it's important for us all tonight that we see to it that we are not weak in our understanding of God's vital truth because if we don't make the effort if we don't try and keep filling our minds with God's truth that's partly why we're here tonight it's part of our worship to actually receive we trust a greater understanding of what the word of God is saying to us the spiritual food for our souls because if we're weak in that sense if we just neglect feeding our souls spiritually and God's truth then we're going to be open to the plausible arguments of heresy or of the world and that's why it's so important to have a greater grasp of truth today than I had yesterday because the more you have strength and the more you have this grasp of God's truth increasingly the less likely it is that plausible arguments will lead you away from the truth as it is in Christ

I'm writing this I'm saying this he says to you in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments whenever you find something that just doesn't feel right to you doesn't that doesn't seem to be just quite in accordance with it where do you take it you take it to the truth of God you take it to the Bible you measure it against the truth as God has revealed it and not just in in the Bible itself but as countless generations of faithful Christians and theologians through to Christ have given the church the distilled wisdom that you find in the church's creeds and confessions and commentaries and so on fill your mind with that let that be the structure that really brings stability to your hearts to your lives and then you'll be buttressed you'll then be defended you'll be built up against the plausible arguments of heresy that are designed to lead you away remember heresy is always designed to lead you away from the truth doesn't matter what kind of heresy it is that's what's at the heart of it that's what the purpose of it is heresy is ultimately from the enemy of the church and even if there are many truths along with the main untruth that's being presented it's still hugely damaging so unity threatened by plausible arguments and he's saying

[25 : 07] I'm saying this in order that no one may delude you so that you will have this encouragement so that you will be knitted together in love or being knitted together in love that you will reach full understanding and assurance of the knowledge of God's mystery which is Christ study Christ study the gospel study everything that you see revealed to do with your salvation in Christ but then finally this unity is not just in love and in truth unity threatened by plausible arguments unity is a cause of rejoicing see what he's saying finally in verse 5 though I'm absent in body yet I'm with you in spirit rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ Paul is not with them in person but he's very much with them in mind and spirit and as he's with them in spirit in mind that's why he's saying this is my great struggle for you

I'm with you I'm in support of you I'm there to encourage you I'm there to give you the comfort and the stability that you need to go on as you've begun walk in Christ as you began in Christ now he's using here military terms another favourite metaphor of the apostle along with athletic terms was military terms and when he's talking here about good order and firmness he's borrowing that from the military world where you find what you might call closed ranks against the enemy an efficient army under attack will close ranks they won't leave gaps that's where the unity comes in but here he's saying I rejoice to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ that you're maintaining that you're maintaining this unity in love and in truth and the terms that he uses there remind us that the greatest threat to the gospel and to our own spiritual progress and to the well-being of any congregation of people is always from inside the greatest threat is always from inside that's where it begins that's where disunity begins that's where heresy begins and so he's saying be sure that what you're doing is like me struggling in prayer putting all the effort that you need and have opportunity for so that you may be encouraged knit together in love that you reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery which is Christ this Christ not any Christ of human imagining not the Christ of the heretics but this Christ the Christ in which God has revealed all the treasure and deposited them in him of wisdom and knowledge and rejoicing friends we're blessed with unity nothing's perfect no church in the world has a perfect unity but we're blessed with unity we're together we serve the Lord we're together we seek each of us to contribute to the overall well-being of the congregation and indeed of the wider cause of Christ and that is cause for rejoicing cause for thankfulness yes we we seek certainly to be defended or defend ourselves against plausible arguments that are heretical that will lead us away from the truth but we rejoice when God has blessed us with good order and firmness with unity in the things of his salvation and his praise so may God bless these thoughts and Fstand say

I'll stop letting Him tell people are can't in the verse