

## HOW CONCERNED SHOULD BE ABOUT FALSE DOCTRINE?

Colossians 2:1-5

**Intro:** My subject for this Sunday morning is, *“How concerned should we be about false doctrine?”* I want to give you my answer right away, and then show from my text for this morning what Paul’s answer to that question ought to be. The answer to that question is that we should be very concerned, extremely concerned, about false doctrine. This applies to all of us individually, and it applies to us as a church. But let me say at the outset, if we are going to judge the teaching that we hear from friends, or the teaching that we hear over TV or radio, if we are going to be able to discern between truth and error in the books that we read, or that in mail that comes to our homes, *it is extremely important that we ourselves know the teaching of Scripture. If you and I are to be sensitive to error that comes our way (and there is a lot of it that is aimed at us as Christians), then we must know the teaching of Scripture ourselves.* For the past two weeks we have looked closely at verse 23 in chapter 1 here in Colossians that we are to “continue in The Faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.” With these words Paul was not describing Christians who had just been raised in a Christian home, or those who had some acquaintance with the teaching of the Bible. But he was talking about people who had a solid foundation in the teaching of Scripture, who thoroughly believed and Word of God to such a degree that they were sensitive when false teaching would come along, *and who could not be moved away from “the hope of the Gospel.”*

“The hope of the Gospel” refers to God’s ultimate purpose in salvation. Remember we have seen that there are three tenses to salvation: past, present, and future. The past has to do with what God has done in all of our hearts when we first trusted Christ. The present has to do with where you and I are today in our relationship with the Lord. The future has to do with what God’s ultimate purpose in salvation. This is what Paul had in mind when he spoke of “the hope of the Gospel,” the completion of God’s ultimate purpose in saving us. This is our glorification. Remember that as Paul speaks of “the hope of the Gospel,” he was not speaking about what may, or may not, take place for all of us in the future, but “the hope of the Gospel” is that which is guarantee to all of who are truly saved by the promise of God, and by the power of God. If “the hope of the Gospel” depended upon us, none of us would make it.

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But it is not dependent upon us. Salvation is God's work for us and in us. Paul had no doubt that we will all make it. As he wrote to the church at Philippi about the same time that he wrote to the church in Colosse, he said this in Philippians 1:6:

6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

So you see that if you move away "from the hope of the Gospel," you are moving away from everything that is in the Gospel - past, present, and future. A true Christian will not do this, but we can get led off into a sidetrack by false teachers if we do not know the truth of the Word of God. And we need to be concerned not only about ourselves, but about some who may not be Christians, but have shown some interest in the Bible. It may even be a member of our own family. The Devil is very clever, and he has been very successful in turned people away from the Word of God. But those who are "grounded and settled," are those whom the Devil cannot change.

Now our text for today, Colossians 2:1-5, explains why Paul wrote chapter 1 the way he did. Look back at his prayer in chapter 1, and verse 9. Notice his first request in his prayer. Let me read it for you again. (Read Col. 1:9.)

When Paul was speaking here about God's will, he was not talking about some particular decision that I need to make, what my life work should be, where I should go to school, or whether or not I should buy something in particular. God is concerned about all of those things. But basically Paul was praying that those Colossians who knew the Lord "might be filled with the knowledge of" God's "will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." When anybody is born into the family of God, he, or she, has a lot to learn. And the place where we find what we need to know, is in the Bible. We need to know God. We need to know Christ. We need to learn about the ways of God in our lives. There is more in this wonderful Book than any of us will ever be able to learn. But we need to read it, and ask the Holy Spirit to teach us, and to show us how we are to live and what God is doing in our lives.

If somebody told you that Jesus was born like any ordinary human being, but that He became Christ when He was baptized, and that He ceased to be God on the Cross when He cried out to God, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me" (Matthew 27:46). Or how would you deal with

someone who said that Jesus Christ was just one of the prophets of the Bible, that He was the greatest of the prophets, but He was not God?

Perhaps you remember that when the Lord Jesus was with His disciples in Caesarea Philippi, He asked them, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” Then they began to give Him their answers – “John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” I would be honored if anyone thought that I was John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. I think that the reason the Lord mentioned these three men was because they got more votes from the Jews in that day than anyone else. But the fact is that all of those answers were wrong, and John the Baptist and Elijah and Jeremiah would have been the first to tell people that such answers were wrong. If Jesus were any of those, we would not have a Savior because as great as John the Baptist and Elijah and Jeremiah were, they were all sinners and needed a Savior themselves.

As Paul went on from his prayer He spoke of the Gospel. He spoke of the Gospel. He spoke of Jesus Christ as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and He spoke of Christ as the Head of the Church. Now Paul was mentioning four important areas of doctrine around which there has always been controversy. And these are just a few of the doctrines around which there has always been controversy. But there is no question about where the Bible stands on any of these areas. If you believe that Jesus Christ is not or was not the eternal Son for the living God, you are not grounded and settled in the teaching of the Bible. If you ever did believe the truth about Jesus Christ, but you don't believe it now, you have moved away from “the hope of the Gospel.”

Now with all of this in mind, let us go to chapter 2 in Colossians and see how the false teachers and the false teaching which had invaded Colosse, and especially the church there, we will be the answer that Paul gave to our question, *How concerned should we about false doctrine?*

I want you to notice how Paul described himself in the first verse of chapter 2. It is the word which we get our English word agony. Remember that Paul had never been in Colosse, nor had he been in Laodicea, but that made no difference to him. What was happening in the churches in these two towns made him sick. He was under such a great burden for them that he had trouble sleeping at night. You would think that he had established those churches, and that he had given them their first teaching in Scripture. Let me read to you what one expositor has

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written about the Apostle Paul at this time, and let us think if we even come close to our concern about all of the false teaching that is going on in many churches today, even many who claim to be evangelical.

These are the words I want you to hear. Remember he is speaking of the word, “conflict”:

It point out that intense and painful anxiety, which prayed upon him, now in occasional terror, and now in reviving hopes – that ceaseless conflict which filled his waking hours with effort, and relieved with prayer the watches of the night. His soul was in perpetual distress for them: every suspicion about them left a pang behind it – the bare possibility of their relapse and apostasy brought with it unutterable dismay and sorrow . . . It was no easy or supine struggle. He knew what was at stake. They were in danger, and he could not be in the midst of them. The seducer might have been pictured out to him, but he was not privileged to confront him. How the Colossians stood he knew not. He was aware of the hazard they were in generally – but the shiftings of the crisis and its individual results could only be faintly apprehended. Like the caged bird beating its bared and bleeding breast against the wires of its prison, as it hears the repeated cry of its unseen young ones, the apostle turned ever and anon toward those churches, pained to himself their danger and their need of help, and strained his eager spirit to the utmost as he sighed over the possible desolation which might come upon them. Nor did he idly chafe in his confinement – but he wrote this letter (Eadie, John, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians*, p.108).

And we know from chapter 1 in this epistle that Paul was praying!

Paul could easily have told himself that what was going on in Colosse was not his problem, but he was not that kind of a Christian or an apostle. He knew that an attack against the church in Colosse was an attack against the body of Christ. And that if error got a foothold there, the enemy would move on to Laodicea, and other places as well.

But notice another point that the Apostle Paul made in verse 2 of our text.

One of the results of the introduction of false teaching into a church, is that it divides and has an adverse effect upon that which ought to be one of the greatest joys of any church. That is the fellowship of the saints.

When heresy comes along, some are affected; others are not. The less mature are inclined to think that the error is nothing, and will soon pass away. Others would see the extreme danger, as Paul did, and would take a sharp stand against it. It is always the immature who are inclined to minimize the danger of error, and may feel that the smoke screen that false teachers put up, could hardly be detrimental to the church. This is undoubtedly why Paul told Timothy that elders should not be novices, that is, spiritually immature believers, lest through pride they fall into the very trap that the Devil has prepared for them.

So Paul told the Colossian believers that one of their greatest safeguards against false teachers is that they stand guard over their fellowship which is based upon the truth of the Word of God. Error divides; truth unites. And the basic truth upon the church must stand, and never give an inch, is in the revelation which God has made of Himself in Christ. Heresy is characterized by any division that is set up between God and Christ, and the obvious point that is made throughout the NT is that Christ is the final revelation of God, and the acknowledgment of this by the church. The word “mystery” in the NT speaks of a secret which God has kept until the Father was made known in His fulness and glory in the Person of Christ. An attack against the truth is always an attack against Christ.

Look on down to verse 8 and following to the warning that Paul sounded concerning the unique place that Christ has in the revelation of God and in the knowledge of God. See Colossians 2:8-10:

8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.

These are amazing statements that the Apostle Paul makes, insisting that any knowledge that ignores Christ and so does not lead to the knowledge to God, cannot be true knowledge and wisdom. In fact, in Christ as the full revelation of God are hidden (Matthew Henry says, hidden, not from us, but for us). The philosophies of the world which ignore Christ, can only lead to greater and greater ignorance, because “in Him are hid all,” not some, but “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” The knowledge is given to us in the Word, and it leads to true wisdom. “Knowledge is the study, and wisdom its fruit” (Eadie, p. 115). “Hid” suggests

that it is not natural to the human mind, but as we search the Scriptures we find “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” It is no wonder that the Apostle Paul was so agitated and disturbed by false teachers because their ignorance of the Scriptures, and especially of Christ as the revelation of God, could only lead to greater darkness and hopelessness. “The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glory of the Gospel of Christ, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:4).

In verse 4, the Apostle Paul explained why he made the sweeping statements of verses 2 and 3. The false teachers were telling them otherwise. The Devil is always deceptive in the instruction of false teachers, and their arguments often sound very persuasive. That is the reason that the people of God need to be “grounded and settled” in the truth of Scripture. It is only the Word that can keep us from being influence by the false, but persuasive arguments of teachers who do not recognize how crucial it is to understand the truth first. That is what prepares us to stand against false teaching. Our primary object is to protect ourselves, and then to spread the truth. If all of the treasure of wisdom and knowledge are to be found in God and Christ, then we don’t need anything else. “Neither is there salvation in any other.” One writer has said,

No philosophy ever dreamed of such an awful expedient as God robed in humanity, and in that nature dying to redeem His guilty creatures – whose name, nature, and leal liabilities He had assumed; and such a scheme never found a place in any system of jurisprudence. Such knowledge was too wonderful for them, it was high, they could not attain unto it.

See Psalm 139:6.

Another verse that also applies is 1 Corinthians 2::9:

9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

But then Paul went on to say immediately in verse 10:

10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

Where has God revealed them? Not in visions which men claim to have. Nor in superior knowledge that the false teacher professes to have found. What God has prepared for them that love Him is found in the Word, hidden, and so it requires that we read the Scriptures to find truth which cannot be found in any other place, and which infinitely surpassed

anything that man is capable to producing.

Paul's concern was that the false teachers would deceive them with their persuasive speech. But we as Christians must learn to examine everything that we hear in the light of what God has revealed in His Word. It is hidden there, but we must search it out, and that is the only way we can stand against the wiles of the Devil.

Our text concludes with Paul's commendation of the believers in Colosse. Paul's absence caused him supreme distress because he was not with them, but he assured them that though he was not with them, and could not go to them at that time, Yet he was encouraged by what he had heard. He was with them in spirit "joying and beholding your order," he said, "and the steadfastness of their faith in Christ."

**Concl:** The Devil is always against the truth. But the people of God are safe when they are focused upon Christ and continuing to explore in the Word "all the riches of the full understanding" through their continued searching of the Scriptures to learn more of the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God which are found in Christ.