

Series: *Colossians: The Supremacy and Sufficiency of Christ*

Lesson: *The Minister's Struggle*

Text: Colossians 2:1-7 (L6)

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Colonial Hills
Baptist Church

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Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter

TEACHING TIP

- Feel free to go through and delete all the footnotes, in order to quickly weed out of sight the extraneous information. Much of that material serves to document some of my own research so that I have immediate access back to it at the relevant point in the text.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Colossians 2:8-15 – *The Sufficiency of Christ vs. Philosophy*

BACKGROUND

"This section functions in two vital ways in the progress of the epistle. First, it ties Paul to the Colossians, identifies his tribulations with their faith, and brings them more closely into the Pauline fold. Second, this autobiographical section serves to introduce the real problem at Colosse, the heresy that tended to undermine the faith. Significantly, Paul first addressed the heresy from personal and ministerial perspectives. He shared his heart with them before moving to theological persuasion to equip them to evaluate the devastating effects of the new heresy."¹

INTRODUCTION

Several times throughout the book of I John, we are confronted with this question, "How can you say you love God, when you don't love your brother?" (I John 2:7-11; 3:13-24; 4:7-21). Oftentimes, we can hear this question and immediately assure ourselves, because we think favorably about our friends at church, we're nice to them, and we even do helpful things for them at times. Perhaps we are so quick to justify ourselves and avoid the conviction of such a question because we evaluate our love for our brothers and sisters according to the wrong standard.

In I John 3:16, we read, "Hereby perceive we the love of God because He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." According to this verse, the brotherly love that John has in mind is a suffering and sacrificial love. In John's thinking, loving your brother was equivalent to suffering for your brother. With that standard in mind, then, the question originally asked brings some sobering conviction.

¹ Melick, Richard R. Vol. 32, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, Electronic Ed., Logos Library System in *The New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001. P. 248.

In Colossians 2:1-7, we see the example of Paul, who out of a deep, deep love for his Savior that caused a reciprocal love for God's people, willingly suffered for God's people. He loved his brothers and sisters to the point of struggling on their behalf, thus proving his love both for them and for Jesus Christ. Are we willing to love our brothers and sisters to that degree? Well, do we *really* love God?

In Colossians 1:24-29, Paul expressed his general gospel ministry to the church, especially the Gentiles. In Colossians 2:1-7, he specifically addresses His gospel ministry to the Colossian (& Laodicean) believers. As he did in all his ministry, Paul labored earnestly for the believers, experiencing intense struggle on their behalf. Such struggle becomes the theme of these seven verses and will be the subject of our study today.

In Colossians 2:1-7, we will consider five aspects of "ministerial struggle." We will use the word "ministerial," but not in a technical sense. Rather, it references the one who engages in gospel ministry (cf. 1:24-29). Paul had been entrusted by God (i.e., as a "steward," 1:25) to be "full-time" in such gospel ministry, and thus, he experienced a fuller degree of "ministerial struggle." However, since everyone should be a gospel minister (1:24-29), we all should experience this struggle on the behalf of others.

THE NATURE OF MINISTERIAL STRUGGLE (v. 1)

In 1:29, Paul related in his endeavor to "present every person perfect in Christ Jesus," he labored and strove. The word for "strive" is the Greek word *agonizomai*, meaning "to engage in a contest, to fight, to struggle."² Applying that exertion of effort to his ministry for the Colossian believers, Paul brings to their attention the "great conflict" he has for them (2:1). The word "conflict" is an alternate form of the same Greek word used above (*agon*), and is often translated "struggle" (NASB, ESV, NIV, NET). So, Paul wants his readers to bring to mind the tremendous struggle he has been engaging³ in on their behalf.⁴


Paul's labor for those to whom he ministered was extreme. He had already referred to the physical "sufferings" he endured as a minister of the gospel and a servant of the church (1:23-25; cf. 4:3, 10, 18). Paul now alludes to his "great"⁵ emotional, mental, and spiritual toil on the behalf of the church—that is, his "struggle" (cf. 2:5). Paul totally involved himself with those to whom he

ministered, struggling with and even *for* them. As one writer paraphrases, "I want you to realize that I continue to work as hard as I know how for you."⁶

According to verse 1, Paul struggled, not only for those whom he had met and knew personally, but also for those with whom he had never come into contact. He struggled in the ministry for the Colossian believers and the Laodicean⁷ believers, even for those many believers who had "not seen [his] face in the flesh." Paul's love for the Savior of the church compelled his concern for the universal church (II Timothy 2:10-12⁸). In many ways, Paul struggled for the maturity of the whole body of Christ (cf. 1:23).

Paul's epistles and the chronicle of his ministry in the book of Acts demonstrates the extreme extent to which Paul "struggled" on the behalf of Christ's body. Paul struggled physically (i.e., in persecution—II Corinthians 11:23-27), mentally (i.e., in preaching, teaching, and writing—Colossians 1:28-29), emotionally (i.e., in carrying the burden of "the care of all the churches"—II Corinthians 11:28), and spiritually (i.e., in prayer—Colossians 4:12). Indeed, Paul "endure[d] all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

In this passage, Paul wants the believers to "know" how great a "struggle" he has been experiencing for them. "What he cannot forget,⁹ he know calls to their remembrance."¹⁰ This is not an arrogant or self-centered request for self-pity (cf. "rejoice" in 1:24), but is rather a reminder of his spiritual authority, a guarantee of his loving concern for them, and an example of faithful continuance (cf. 1:23ff).

 **Application:** What applications suggest themselves to our consideration at this point? (1) *Humble thanksgiving for those who "struggle" in this way for us (cf. I Timothy 6:12), with less criticism perhaps for the way they "struggle."* (2) *Earnest prayer for those who have given themselves full-time to such "struggle."* (3) *Missional willingness to endure such "struggle" for those to whom we are ministering—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.* (4) *An awareness and burden for what is happening to our brothers and sisters in places that are not local.*

⁶ Peterson, Eugene H. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002. Colossians 2:1.

⁷ Laodicea was a neighboring town (cf. 4:16).

⁸ "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: for if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us."

⁹ This is due to the prison he is presently in (4:3, 10, 18).

¹⁰ Begg, Alistair in a sermon on Colossians 2:1-5 entitled "Paul Shares His Heart" preached on 4/29/84. Available here: <http://bit.ly/A9zZsl>

² Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. P. 17.

³ The word "have" is in the present tense indicating that Paul's struggle for the Colossians was being regularly and presently experienced.

⁴ The word "for" translates the Greek preposition *huper*, meaning "on the behalf of, for the sake of."

⁵ Gk. *helikos*, meaning "how great" in reference to the magnitude of something.

Transition: Paul’s ministerial struggle had a specific purpose, and in the next two verses Paul begins to transition to the need at hand—that is, stability for these believers in the midst of the deceivers round about. In verses 2-3, we learn of the goal of Paul’s ministerial struggle.

THE GOAL OF MINISTERIAL STRUGGLE (vv. 2-3)

In verse 2, Paul states that his great “conflict” or “struggle” was in order “that”¹¹ those believers may experience spiritual maturity—in other words, so that they may be “presented perfect in Christ Jesus” (1:28) even in the presence of persuasive, but false teaching (2:4). In his perfecting and protecting ministerial struggle, Paul sought to accomplish four goals in the lives of the believers.

1. *He struggled*¹² *to strengthen their hearts.*

Paul labored so that the believers’ “hearts might be comforted.” The word “comfort” means “to call alongside” (Gk. *parakaleo*). A person may be called alongside another individual for many reasons, which is demonstrated by the many ways in which this word is translated in the New Testament.¹³ In context, Paul wanted to see these believers strengthened,¹⁴ and such strength needed to take root in their “hearts.” Paul labored that they may be established and empowered internally, in their core—that is, in their minds and thought-processes. A strong mind leads to a stable life (cf. II Corinthians 10:5; Ephesians 3:16-21). Therefore, this was Paul’s prayer request for the Ephesians believers in Ephesians 3:16.¹⁵ It is the Holy Spirit who answers such a prayer request, for He dwells within us and is, after all, the Paraklete or Strengthener (Gk. *parakletos*—John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

¹¹ The Greek *hina* implies purpose, aim, or goal (Arndt, p. 475).

¹² While we typically use “struggle” negatively to reflect a difficult situation in which we often seem to be losing headway, I’m using it in these points in reference to Paul’s earnest labor for the Colossian’s maturity.

¹³ “They include to entreat, appeal to, summon, comfort, exhort, or encourage” (MacArthur, John. *Colossians*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1996. P. 83).

¹⁴ “Commentator William Barclay cites an example of *parakaleo* from classical Greek that parallels its usage here. ‘There was a Greek regiment which had lost heart and was utterly dejected. The general sent a leader to talk to it to such purpose that courage was reborn and a body of dispirited men became fit again for heroic action. That is what [*parakaleo*] means here. It is Paul’s prayer that the Church may be filled with that courage which can cope with any situation’” (*The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* [Louisville: Westminster, 1975], p. 129, quoted in *Ibid.*). Cf. Arndt, p. 765—“to instill someone with courage” or “to encourage.”

¹⁵ “...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man.”

These believers needed this strength because of the persuasive false teachings around them (cf. 2:4) that were undermining their stability in their supreme and sufficient Christ (cf. 2:8-15, 16-23). They also needed spiritual strength to live out the life of the living Christ who was in them (cf. 3:1ff).

2. *He struggled to unite them in love.*

The phrase “being knit together in love” begins with a participle that stands in subordination to the previous phrase. Our task is to determine the function of that subordination—that is, does it denote cause (i.e., “...because they are united in love”), condition (i.e., “...if they are united in love”), means (“...by being united in love”), manner (i.e., “...in being united in love”), result (“...resulting in being united in love”), or something else?

While various interpretations have been argued for, it’s helpful to simply start with the recognition that Paul’s ministry is aimed at unifying the believers in love. Considering Paul’s previous commendation for their love (1:4, 8), his emphasis here seems to be on their unity. Their already-fervent love for one another should establish them in harmony (cf. 3:12-14), and as the old adage goes, “There is strength in numbers.”¹⁶ The unity that they shared with one another would be a rich source of encouragement and inner strength.¹⁷ So, Paul’s ministry struggle seems to have been aimed (1) at establishing these believers in the love of God one for another (2) so that they would be united in fellowship and (3) thereby strengthened in heart.

3. *He struggled to enrich them through assurance.*

Internal, Spirit-given strength will enable us to participate in “all riches of the full assurance of understanding” (cf. Ephesians 1:17-18). Paul wanted his readers to have more than just an knowledge of or agreement with what they had been taught by Epaphras and others. He wanted them by faith and obedience (cf. Hebrews 10:22) to understand those truths of God’s Word against the persuasive deception of the false teachers (cf. v. 4). “Understanding” denotes comprehension and insight, carrying the idea of being able to provide answers and direction (cf. Luke 2:47; II Timothy 2:7). Such understanding contributes to a full assurance or confidence in

¹⁶ “A person left alone, with no support, is much more vulnerable than a cohesive unit” (Anders, Max. Vol. 8, *Galatians-Colossians in the Holman New Testament Commentary*, Holman Reference. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999. P. 303).

¹⁷ “The presence of un-Christian teaching in a church is always divisive. Unity is quickly lost, and the loving concern for the best interests of one another that should characterize believers soon disappears. Paul knew that if the Christians in Colossae would stop lending a sympathetic ear to the smooth-talking errorists and would join in an even closer union of hearts, such actions would provide the strength and encouragement vital to spiritual victory in an hour of crisis” (Kent, Homer A. Jr. *Treasures of Wisdom: Studies in Colossians and Philemon*, Revised Ed. Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1987. P. 72.).

one's own beliefs against the deceptions of others. When you know what you believe, why you believe it, and what that means for your life,¹⁸ you will be armed with a "full assurance" in your walk with God. This is a tremendous treasure for the Christian.¹⁹

Therefore, Paul and others were unceasing in their ministry of teaching and re-teaching (cf. II Peter 1:12-15) so that believers would understand and be assured of the truth. Paul struggled, not just so that people would hear and know the Word, but so that they would respond to it in understanding, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, unto the eternal riches of assurance (cf. I Thessalonians 1:5).²⁰

4. *He struggled to establish them in Christ.*

Paul's ultimate goal in his struggle for the believers' strength, unity, and assurance was their full knowledge of Christ. The Greek here literally reads, "...unto the full knowledge²¹ of the mystery of God, [namely] Christ." As we have already seen, against the secretive and limited knowledge of the Colossian heretics, Paul has continually expressed the real possibility for the believers to know God fully and personally (cf. 1:9, 10, 15). He has also stressed that Christ is the climax of God's mystery or revelation (cf. 1:25-28), fully supreme and sufficient (cf. 1:15-23). We

know God fullest by knowing Christ (cf. 1:15). And, we know how to relate to God best by knowing Christ, for in Him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (v. 3). To know reality (i.e., knowledge) and how it applies to life (i.e., wisdom), you must know Jesus Christ (cf. I Corinthians 2:9-14). He is supreme and sufficient, and all life and living are only through Him, God's mystery. This was the ultimate goal for which Paul struggled—He tirelessly preached Christ, so that people may be made mature in Him (cf. 1:27-29), "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (I Corinthians 1:30).²²

It is this last ministerial goal that ultimately accomplishes the first three. It is only through an active and growing relationship with Jesus Christ that

²² **Illustration:** In his book *Souls on Fire*, Elie Weissel tells a remarkable tale. In far away Krakau, in days when sleep was often disturbed by dreams, there lived one Isaac, son of Yechel. Isaac was a poor man whose family seldom ate their fill. One night in a vivid dream, he saw the distant city of Prague. He saw a river flowing through the city, and under a particular bridge he saw a buried treasure. When he woke the next morning, the dream had not faded. Its clear and vivid images remained etched on his mind. That night the dream returned. And the next night. Every night for two weeks, Isaac had the same dream in which he saw the city of Prague, the river, the bridge, and the buried treasure hidden beneath the bridge.

Finally, he decided to walk all the way to Prague to see for himself if the dream might be real. After several days he arrived in the city. Even though he had never been there, he recognized it and knew it well from his dreams. He found the bridge, went under it to search for the treasure, and then suddenly was grabbed firmly at the back of his neck by a soldier who dragged him away to prison for interrogation.

The soldier sat him in a chair and said, "All right, Jew, what were you doing prowling around under that bridge?" Not knowing what else to say, Isaac decided to tell the truth, "I had a dream that there was buried treasure under that bridge, and I was looking for it."

Immediately, the soldier burst into mocking laughter, "You stupid Jew, don't you know that you can't believe what you see in your dreams? Why, for the last two weeks I myself have had a dream every night that far away in the city of Krakau, in the house of some Jew by the name of Isaac, son of Yechel, there is a treasure buried beneath the sink in his house. Wouldn't it be the most idiotic of actions if I were to go all the way to Krakau to look for some Jew that doesn't exist. Or there may be a thousand Isaacs, son of Yechel. I could waste a lifetime looking for a treasure that isn't there." With uproarious laughter, the soldier stood him up, opened the door, gave him a good kick, and let him go.

Naturally, Isaac, son of Yechel, walked back to Krakau, back to his own house, where he looked beneath the sink in his own kitchen, found the treasure buried there, and lived to a ripe old age as a rich man. The treasure was at home all along.

This truth applies to Christians as well: our treasure is in Jesus Christ, who resides in us. We don't have to look anywhere else. Paul wrote to the Colossians because false teachers were telling them that Jesus Christ was not sufficient; they needed some additional spiritual experiences. They taught that Jesus himself was inadequate and this inadequate Jesus couldn't provide all they needed for a full spiritual experience.

Paul countered this claim by telling the Colossian believers, as well as their modern counterparts, that Jesus is the fullness of God and that because of their relationship with him, they have been given fullness. The treasure is Christ, who is in them. Paul tells them in this chapter not to look for other treasure when the true treasure is already theirs" (Anders, pp. 301-302).

¹⁸ Perhaps we could say, "knowledge," "understanding," and "wisdom," respectively.

¹⁹ Kent provides a helpful explanation of this phrase: "As long as the believers were uncertain about the basic truths of their faith they were vulnerable to being swayed by any persuasive teacher who might appear. Their understanding was their ability to bring together the various data and concepts that related to the subject under discussion and put them together in the proper way. Presumably the Colossians had been taught accurately by Epaphras and perhaps others. Their understanding should have been correct. What was needed now was the full assurance that their understanding was true. When such confidence was achieved, based upon a proper understanding of God's truth, the readers would be in possession of a great treasure. Paul called it the "wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding." Spiritual prosperity consists of understanding and being confident of God's truth. Too many of God's people live in spiritual poverty, uncertain of what God has provided for them, and become easy prey for every cult and religious charlatan that comes along" (pp. 72-73).

²⁰ MacArthur provides a helpful application of this point: "When the believer experiences spiritual truth by living it, it becomes truly understood and leads to assurance of his or her salvation. The New Testament, then, concludes that knowing the truth and acting on it leads to full assurance of understanding. People often express to me doubts about their salvation, even though they have read books on assurance. Their primary problem is not a lack of knowledge, but a failure to apply the truths they know. Truth that finds solid footing in a strong heart and works itself out in love of fellow believers results in deep conviction. That is the basis for assurance" (p. 89).

²¹ Gk. *epignosis*, stressing full, deep, personal knowledge. "The Greek implies, "full and accurate knowledge." It is a distinct Greek word from "knowledge," Col 2:3. Alford translates, "thorough...knowledge." *Acknowledgment* hardly is strong enough; they did in a measure *acknowledge* the truth; what they wanted was the *full and accurate knowledge* of it (compare Notes, see on Col 1:9,10; Php 1:9)" (Jamieson, Robert, A. R. Fausset, et al., *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997. Colossians 2:2.).

His supremacy and sufficiency will move from the realm of intellectual understanding to personal realization. Assurance, contentment, discernment, patience, stability, love, unity, and a host of other Christian virtues are directly linked to an experiential knowledge of God's mystery, Jesus Christ (cf. II Peter 1:3ff). This is truth that is worth struggling for in our own lives and in the lives of believers round about us. We must be established upon Christ!

Kent provides a final consideration from these verses:

We should not miss, however, the implication of the term "hidden."²³ The words means "concealed" or "stored up." The thought is that if we possess Christ (and every believer does, John 14:23), then we possess all the treasures [of wisdom and knowledge]. But because the treasures are hidden in Christ, believers must grow in their understanding of Christ in order to enjoy the treasures. Even the newest believer is "in Christ" and Christ is in him, but there must be a growth "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Not all believers are equally aware of the riches they possess in Christ. Here then is a challenge to the Colossians and to us to search deeply into the Word of God to discover the treasures that we have in Him."²⁴



Application: What are some application principles that we can pull from these two verses? (1) *Church is more than just a cultural experience or family tradition; it should be the means whereby your heart is strengthened through the harmonious fellowship with other believers. Therefore, to disengage from it is to do harm to your own soul.* (2) *I need to exercise my mind to understand God's Word and by faith to believe it. Such understanding strengthens my heart and enriches me with assurance, and it is found in a relationship with the Treasure Himself—Jesus Christ.* (3) *In my gospel ministry, I should strive beyond evangelism to strengthen people in their love for one another and in their understanding of God's truth. I should seek to plant within them a pursuit of knowing Christ that will provide them with the answers and stability that I cannot.*

Transition: Paul was earnest in his ministry for the church, partly because he had much to accomplish (i.e., the goals of his ministerial struggle) and partly for a more negative reason.

²³ "'Hidden' is from *apokruphos*, from which we get our English word *apocrypha*. It was used by the heretics to refer to the writings containing their secret knowledge. But there is no hidden spiritual knowledge necessary to salvation and sanctification outside of Christ. The treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Christ, however, are hidden from all but Christians" (MacArthur, p. 90).

²⁴ Kent, pp. 74-75.

Paul offers two reasons for his struggle on the behalf of the Colossian and Laodicean believers.

1. False teaching was persuasive.

In verse 4, Paul writes, "And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words." Paul clarifies that what he has just "said"—that is, that in Christ "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"—was intended to provide the believers with a standard against which to weigh all other teaching. Since Christ is the Source of all true wisdom and knowledge, any teaching that contradicted or undermined Him would be false teaching.

Such a standard is very helpful, because some false teaching is very "beguiling" and "enticing." "Beguile" simple means to deceive, while "entice" refers to "plausible, but false, speech resulting from the use of well-constructed, probable arguments—'convincing speech, plausible language.'"²⁵ We are reminded here that "truth and persuasion do not always correlate. Error can persuade."²⁶

2. Good teaching was absent.

In verse 5, Paul simply states that he is "absent [from them] in the flesh." While they were in Asia Minor, Paul was several hundred miles away in a Roman prison. In fact, even their pastor, Epaphras, was currently absent, for he had travelled to Rome to seek Paul's counsel for these matters that he felt inadequate.



Application: What should our ministerial struggle look like in light of this point? (1) *"The greatest danger regarding cults...is complacency—considering ourselves and our children to be immune from their attraction. If Christ is not the center of a Christian's life, that Christian is ripe for another spirit" (Paul Fox).²⁷ These "spirits" or false teachings are addressed in the latter half of chapter 2. (2) Since false teaching will not be fully silenced until Christ is glorified (cf. Philippians 2:9-11), we cannot afford to be slack in our ministry of the Word (cf. Acts 20:18-35). We must exalt Christ, and we must do so now and always. Furthermore, we must do so in such a way that His supremacy and sufficiency are expounded and magnified (cf. Philippians 2:16-18). (3) This passage should motivate those who have been given the vision, burden, and ability to reach audiences of international proportions. It may be their teaching or writing ministry that provides a Christ-centered voice of stability in a time when good teaching would otherwise be absent and false teaching would appear credible.*

²⁵ Louw, Johannes P. and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, Electronic Ed. of the 2nd Edition. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996.

²⁶ Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983. Colossians 2:4-5.

²⁷ Anders, p. 300.

Transition: So far, the struggle of the gospel minister has been duly shown. Those who serve the church in gospel ministry will encounter a “great conflict.” However, such struggle will evoke exceeding joy as God blesses our labor (cf. 1:29) and produces His fruit. Therefore, we look “unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, [disregarding] the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2-3). His joy becomes ours as we labor for Him!

THE JOY OF MINISTERIAL STUGGLE (v. 5)

Paul’s struggle produced joy when he saw two evidences of maturity in the believers—“your order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.” This use of the word “order” is found additionally only in I Corinthians 14:40, and “steadfastness” is nowhere else used in the New Testament. MacArthur explains these terms:

*Taxis (good discipline) and stereoma (stability) are both military terms, perhaps suggested by Paul’s close contact with Roman soldiers during his imprisonment (cf. Acts 28:16; Phil. 1:13). Taxis refers to a line of soldiers drawn up for battle, whereas stereoma refers to the solidity of a formation of soldiers. Taken together, they express Paul’s joy that individually and collectively the Colossians were standing firm against the attacks of false teaching.*²⁸

From the reports that Paul heard from Epaphras about the Colossian believers (cf. 1:4-9), they were orderly in behavior and grounded by faith in Christ alone as their supreme and sufficient Savior.²⁹ Therefore, he rejoiced that his struggle on their behalf had not been in vain. While false teaching was threatening, it had apparently made little progress within their ranks. Paul now wants to strengthen them for continued stability and continuation in Christ.



Application: What success story can you share where you engaged in a dependent struggle on the behalf of someone for his/her spiritual stability, and to your joy, you saw God bring forth fruit in his/her life? *Share testimonies.* What happens when you don’t experience this opportunity for joy (cf. Isaiah’s ministry)? *See the discussion on 1:24—our ultimate joy needs to be in Christ Himself and in the big work that He is doing of which we are a part; ultimately, Jesus wins and joy will be unavoidable—this is “hope.”*

²⁸ MacArthur, pp. 90-91.

²⁹ “He encourages them with the good reports he has heard: the well-ordered Christian behaviour of the community, together with the firmness of their dynamic *faith* which was directed to Christ alone, were grounds for the apostle’s *delight*. These words of praise indicate that the congregation was basically sound and that the false teaching had not made significant progress” (Carson, D. A. *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th Ed. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994. Colossians 1:24–2:5.).

Transition: Verse 6 begins with a transitional word that leads us to our final consideration. The “therefore” that initiates this verse compels us to consider our response to the ministerial struggle.

THE RESPONSE TO MINISTERIAL STUGGLE (vv. 6-7)

In particular, we should consider from these verses what our response should be toward the struggle of those who minister for us. After all, having brought his struggle for the Colossian believers to their attention, he now charges them to cooperate with his labor by continuing in Christ and abounding with thankfulness.

1. *Continue in Christ*

Paul exhorts the Colossian and Laodicean believers to “walk in Christ” “as” they had “received Him.” The term “walk” is frequently employed by Paul to express daily conduct and living. “In this context it means primarily to continue believing the truth about Christ, not allowing their Christology to waver.”³⁰ So, they had received Him as “Christ Jesus the Lord”—that is the Messiah, Savior, and Master—and were to continue in that same personal acknowledgement (cf. 1:23). They had received Him as supreme and sufficient (cf. 1:15-23), as God and Savior, and they were to abide in that same understanding. They had received Him by faith unto immediate fruitfulness and growth (cf. 1:3-8), and were to maintain such faithfulness. MacArthur adds,

In broader terms, however, walking in Christ means living in union with Him. It means to maintain a lifestyle patterned after His. “The one who says he abides in Him,” the apostle John writes, “ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 2:6). When faced with the dilemmas that confront Christians in their daily lives, the guideline should be, “What would Jesus do in this situation?”³¹

Such continuation in Christ and Christlikeness was simply the result of God already “rooting” them in Christ at salvation.³² In Him, they had everything they needed (II Peter 1:3) for continuing in the faith (1:23) and being presented perfect before God (1:28). This continued maturity would come through (1) “being built up in Christ” as they studied the “Word of His grace” (Acts 20:32; II Peter 3:18) and “beheld His glory” in those pages (II Corinthians 3:18-4:6), and through (2) “being established in the faith,” that

³⁰ MacArthur, p. 91.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² The word is a perfect participle, indicating something that happened in the past with continuing results. It is also passive, which demonstrates that Someone else rooted them.


is, the apostolic, gospel truth they had been “taught” (cf. 1:6-7). While the believer should pursue this stability in the gospel by preaching its realities to Himself and practicing them in life, the passive mood of this participle demonstrates that God must accomplish such strengthening (cf. Romans 16:25; II Thessalonians 2:16–17; I Peter 5:10; Jude 24). Furthermore, the passive nature of both participles further depict God’s commitment to building us up and establishing us.

As Christ was sufficient for reconciliation (1:20-23), He is also sufficient for our maturation (1:28-29)—indeed, He is the prototype and standard of such maturity. Having been rooted in Christ, now being built up in Christ and established in His teaching, we will come “unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). The best way to honor those who have struggled on our behalf is to cooperate with their ministry by continuing in Christ.

2. *Abound with thankfulness*

This active participle demonstrates the appropriate and unavoidable response for any believer who understands the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ as taught so far in this epistle. When we are “rooted” in Christ in salvation and “being built up and established” in and through Him in sanctification, we cannot help but abound or overflow with gratitude, which is the sacrifice due to Him (cf. Hebrews 13:15). MacArthur provides a fitting summary:

*Praise completes the circle in which the blessings that flow to us from God return to Him in the form of our praise and adoration. By taking in the truth of the Word, believers get a strong mind. By living out those truths, they receive full assurance that Christ is who He claimed to be. Assured of that, they can appropriate the riches that are His legacy to believers, and walk in Him. As they walk in Him, they will grow in Him and become established in their faith. As a result, they will give praise to God.*³³

 **Application:** Discuss what “walking in Christ Jesus the Lord, as you have received Him” will practically look like. (1) *Starting point:* “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him (v. 6; see also 2:16; 2:20; 3:5, 12). This takes the Colossians back to their conversion. How good to travel back there from time to time and to have seasons of spiritual retreat—times of being alone with Christ to think, remember and meditate on the great things He has done for you [and personally worship Him for that]. Plan this into your routine and let Sunday—the Lord’s Day—be that weekly day of spiritual retreat when you find time to be alone with God.”³⁴

³³ Ibid., p. 92.

³⁴ McNaughton, Ian S. *Opening Up Colossians and Philemon*. Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006. P. 41.

(2) *The “Word of grace” and its “glory of God in the face of Christ” should be routinely studied and gazed at.* (3) *I should be renewing my mind and responses with Christ-centered thoughts and responses—e.g., What would He think about this? How would He respond to this? What would weigh into His choices? What pursuits would He engage in?*

CONCLUSION

“Imagine for a moment that you are poor and needy. You are desperate. Ragged, shabby clothes. You haven’t eaten in several days. You are cold, and you are tired because you have been walking all day. Darkness advances swiftly. You notice some lights in the distance through the trees. Your aching stomach urges your throbbing feet to keep going just a little farther. As you draw closer, you see the lights are a blaze of white against the night. It’s a huge house. Curtains are drawn back to reveal activity inside. You inch closer for a better look, until your face presses against the window. You stand there for a few moments without being noticed—shocked at what you see. It’s a feast. A huge table is covered from end to end with more food than you’ve seen in months—green vegetables, steaming meat, cold drinks, warm bread. Your stomach rumbles; your mouth waters. You feel faint from hunger. As a butler is serving the guests, the master of the house glances over and notices your face pressed against the window. He thinks to himself, *Here is a needy person*. He motions for the butler to go out and speak to you. Your first instinct is to try to get away fast, because you think they want to punish you for trespassing. The butler calls out to you, “Please, the master would like you to come in and dine at the table.” So you go in—and eat. Your great need has been met by the fullness of the table.

In a similar way, our great spiritual need has been met by the fullness of the table of blessings in Christ. Jesus Christ is the fullness of deity, and from His fullness He has given us spiritual fullness. Why look elsewhere? Why look for treasure we already have? As believers we have the awesome opportunity to feed at the table of spiritual blessing in Christ.”³⁵

Such treasure should be joyfully enjoyed personally and tirelessly shared corporately. Let us struggle together, then, to find ourselves satisfied in Christ alone.

³⁵ Anders, pp. 310-11.

<i>My Sufficiency in Christ – Getting Christ – “Having been rooted in Him”</i>	<i>My Satisfaction in Christ – Continuing in Christ – “Being built up in Him”</i>
<p>In Christ alone my hope is found He is my light, my strength, my song This Cornerstone, this solid ground Firm through the fiercest drought and storm What heights of love, what depths of peace When fears are stilled, when strivings cease My Comforter, my All in All Here in the love of Christ I stand</p> <p>In Christ alone, who took on flesh Fullness of God in helpless babe This gift of love and righteousness Scorned by the ones He came to save 'Till on that cross as Jesus died The wrath of God was satisfied For every sin on Him was laid Here in the death of Christ I live</p> <p>There in the ground His body lay Light of the world by darkness slain Then bursting forth in glorious Day Up from the grave He rose again And as He stands in victory Sin's curse has lost its grip on me For I am His and He is mine Bought with the precious blood of Christ</p> <p>No guilt in life, no fear in death This is the power of Christ in me From life's first cry to final breath Jesus commands my destiny No power of hell, no scheme of man Can ever pluck me from His hand 'Till He returns or calls me home Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.</p>	<p>I run to Christ when chased by fear And find a refuge sure. “Believe in me,” His voice I hear; His words and wounds secure.</p> <p>I run to Christ when torn by grief And find abundant peace. “I too had tears,” He gently speaks; Thus joy and sorrow meet.</p> <p>I run to Christ when worn by life And find my soul refreshed. “Come unto Me,” He calls through strife; Fatigue gives way to rest.</p> <p>I run to Christ when vexed by hell And find a mighty arm. “The Devil flees,” the Scriptures tell; He roars, but cannot harm.</p> <p>I run to Christ when stalked by sin And find a sure escape. “Deliver me,” I cry to Him; Temptation yields to grace.</p> <p>I run to Christ when plagued by shame And find my one defense. “I bore God’s wrath,” He pleads my case— My Advocate and Friend.</p>

<i>To Summarize – Complete in Thee! (cf. 2:10)</i>	
<p>Complete in Thee! No work of mine May take, dear Lord, the place of Thine; Thy blood hath pardon bought for me, And I am now complete in Thee.</p> <p><i>Refrain:</i> Yea, justified! O blessed thought! And sanctified! Salvation wrought! Thy blood hath pardon bought for me, And glorified, I too, shall be!</p>	<p>Complete in Thee—no more shall sin, Thy grace hath conquered, reign within; Thy voice shall bid the tempter flee,</p> <p>And I shall stand complete in Thee. Complete in Thee—each want supplied, And no good thing to me denied; Since Thou my portion, Lord, wilt be, I ask no more, complete in Thee.</p> <p>Dear Savior! when before Thy bar All tribes and tongues assembled are, Among Thy chosen will I be, At Thy right hand—complete in Thee.</p>