



Paul's Letter to the Colossians Study
Bible Study Session 07
Colossians 2:1-5: Topic 4.2
"Strengthening Ministry"

Study By
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Greek NT

2.1 Θέλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ἡλίκον ἀγῶνα ἔχω ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ καὶ ὅσοι οὐχ ἔώρακαν τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ἐν σαρκί, 2 ἵνα παρακληθῶσιν αἱ καρδίαι αὐτῶν, συμβιβασθέντες ἐν ἀγάπῃ καὶ εἰς πᾶν πλοῦτος τῆς πληροφορίας τῆς συνέσεως, εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ, Χριστοῦ, 3 ἐν ᾧ εἰσιν πάντες οἱ θησαυροὶ τῆς σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως ἀπόκρυφοί. 4 τοῦτο λέγω ἵνα μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς παραλογίζεται ἐν πιθανολογίᾳ. 5 εἰ γὰρ καὶ τῆ σαρκὶ ἀπείμι, ἀλλὰ τῷ πνεύματι σὺν ὑμῖν εἰμι, χαίρων καὶ βλέπων ὑμῶν τὴν τάξιν καὶ τὸ στερέωμα τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν πίστεως ὑμῶν.

Gute Nachricht Bibel

2 1 Es liegt mir daran, dass ihr wisst, wie sehr es bei diesem meinem Kampf um euch in Kolossä geht und auch um die Gemeinde in Laodizea und überhaupt um alle, die mich persönlich nicht kennen gelernt haben. 2 Ich möchte, dass sie alle Mut bekommen und in Liebe zusammenhalten und dass sie zur ganzen reichen Fülle des Verstandes gelangen und Gottes Geheimnis begreifen, nämlich Christus. 3 In ihm sind alle Schätze der Weisheit und Erkenntnis verborgen. 4 Ich sage das, damit euch niemand durch Überredungskünste hinter Licht führt. 5 Obwohl ich fern von euch bin, bin ich im Geist bei euch und freue mich zu sehen, wie fest ihr zusammenhaltet und wie unerschütterlich euer Glaube an Christus ist.

NRSV

1 For I want you to know how much I am struggling for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face. 2 I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments. 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

NLT

1 I want you to know how much I have agonized for you and for the church at Laodicea, and for many other friends who have never known me personally. 2 My goal is that they will be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love. I want them to have full confidence because they have complete understanding of God's secret plan, which is Christ himself. 3 In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I am telling you this so that no one will be able to deceive you with persuasive arguments. 5 For though I am far away from you, my heart is with you. And I am very happy because you are living as you should and because of your strong faith in Christ.

The Study of the Text:¹

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

In 1:24-29, Paul expresses his joy in suffering for the benefit of the Colossians. The emphasis there is upon the nature of his ministry as suffering. In 2:1-5, he continues the focus upon his ministry but with a shift in emphasis. Here the thrust is upon his 'agonizing' (ἀγῶνα) for the churches which he has never visited personally, including the ones at Colossae and at Laodicea. He speaks of his goal for them as the centerpiece of his agonizing over them. This centers on protecting the churches against the potential damage by false teachings coming into the congregation. The strategy for this is healthy spiritual growth. Thus we discover an important principle here: a healthy spiritual congregation is the best way to ward off heresy and false

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

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teaching.

Historical Context:

Understanding the historical aspects of the passage is important for correct interpretation of the ideas in the text.

External History. In the history of the copying of this passage over the first millennium of the church, only one variation in wording surfaces that the editors of the UBS printed Greek text, *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed., consider significant enough to impact the translation of this text into other languages.

In verse two the phrase τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ, Χριστοῦ (*the mystery of God, Christ*) seemed strange to many copyists. Consequently a wide variation of alternative wording surfaces in an effort to clarify the perceived meaning of the original writing.² But the strong external and internal evidence strongly argues for the printed text reading.³ The idea expressed is that Christ is the mystery of God.⁴ Because this appears on the surface to express a slightly different idea than in 1:27, Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, ἡ ἐλπὶς τῆς δόξης, as τὸ μυστήριον (1:26), numerous efforts to adjust the wording here in 2:2 surface over the centuries of copying the text.

In the Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece (27th rev. ed.) some ten places where variations in wording are found in the manuscript copies of this passage.⁵ But careful examination

²{B} τοῦ θεοῦ, Χριστοῦ P⁴⁶ B vg^{ms} Hilary Pelagius // τοῦ θεοῦ D¹ H P 6 424^c 436* 1881 1912 2464 cop^{sams} // τοῦ Χριστοῦ 81 1241 (1739 omit τοῦ) it^b (Fulgentius) // τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἐστὶν Χριστὸς D* it^{ar, d, o} vg^{mss} Augustine^{1/2, (1/2)} Varimadum // τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ 33 (Clement); Ambrosiaster // τοῦ θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ (κ* 048 omit second τοῦ) A C 0150 1175 1 596 it^{(f), (mon)} (vg^{ww, st}) (vg^{mss}) (cop^{sams}) cop^{bo} (Ambrose) // τοῦ θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ 075 0208 459 (I 809* omit πατρὸς) (vg^{cl}) (vg^{mss}) syr^p Chrysostom (Severian) Theodoret // τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ κ² L Ψ 256 263 365 1319 1573 1962 2127 / 422 / 593 / 603 / 809^c / 1153 vg^{ms} geo² slav // τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ D² 104 424* 436c 1852 (2200 πνεύματος for πατρὸς) Byz [K L] Lect (I 1154 omit second τοῦ) syr^h with *

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); The Greek New Testament, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000; 2009).]

³“Among what at first sight seems to be a bewildering variety of variant readings, the one adopted for the text is plainly to be preferred (a) because of strong external testimony (P46 B Hilary Pelagius Ps-Jerome) and (b) because it alone provides an adequate explanation of the other readings as various scribal attempts to ameliorate the syntactical ambiguity of τοῦ θεοῦ, Χριστοῦ.” [Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 555.]

⁴“There is a bewildering variety of variant readings here. (See the listing and discussion in Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, pp. 236–38). But the reading in the text is plainly to be preferred. It has strong external testimony, and it alone provides an adequate explanation of the other readings as attempts by various copyists to improve the ambiguity of the words τοῦ θεοῦ, Χριστοῦ. For reasons of clarity in the receptor language, it may be necessary to add the words ‘that is,’ as some copyists did. Compare ‘the knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ himself’ (NRSV, similarly REB) and ‘the mystery of God, namely, Christ’ (NIV). NJB follows the shorter reading: ‘knowledge of the mystery of God.’

“Barth and Blanke (Colossians, p. 281) state that all the variants can be explained as paraphrases or modifications of the reading in the text. ‘The number of the variants is probably conditioned by the fact that two interpretations are possible from the original transmission, whose form or specifically whose expression is without parallel in Paul: (1) the mystery of the God of Christ ...; (2) the mystery of God, Christ ...’”

[Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 413-14.]

⁵Kolossar 2,1

* περι D² F G 0208 M m (the preposition περί is substituted for ὑπέρ)

| txt P46 κ A B C D¹ H P Ψ 075. 0278. 33. 81. 104. 365. 630. 1175. 1505. 1739. 1881. 2464 pc lat; Ambst

* (4,13) και των εν Ιεραπολει 104. 424 pc vg^{ms} sy^{h**} (this phrase ‘and those in Hierapolis’ is added after Λαοδικεία)

Kolossar 2,2

* -θεντων κ² D² Ψ 075. 0278 M sy^{hmg} (the participle συμβιβασθέντες is replaced by either a different ptc. ending -θεντων or the regular verb form -θωσιν)

| -θωσιν 1881

| txt P46 κ*^c A B C D* H P 6. 33. 1175. 1241^s. 1739. 2464 pc; CI

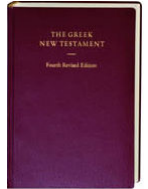
* D* syp; Hil Ambst (the conjunction και is omitted in a few manuscripts)

* παν το πλ. A C 33. 81 pc (the phrase πᾶν πλοῦτος is replaced by πάντα πλοῦτον by a few manuscripts)

| παντα (+ τον D*) πλουτον κ² D H^{vid} Ψ 075. 0278. 1881 M

| txt P46 κ* B 0208^{vid}. 6. 1241^s. 1739 pc; CI

* του θεου D¹ H P 1881. 2464 pc sa^{ms} (the τοῦ θεοῦ is replaced or modified by several alternatives listed below)



of each of these variation reflects what we have consistently observed up to this point: the changes are cosmetic variations that are either stylistic in nature or reflect an unconscious misreading of the text being copied. No essential meaning shift in the text is produced by any of the variations.

Internal History. The time / place markers in 2:1-5 are a little more prevalent than in 1:24-29, but still lack extensive detail. The two historical references center around the lack of a personal visit to Colossae and Laodicea by Paul, but the presence of false teachers in these churches. Did these teachers come from the outside, or were they ‘home grown’ false teachers? Exploring the possible answers to these two issues of Paul’s visit and the origin of the false teachers will play an important role in exegeting not only 2:1-5 but also several concerns in 2:6-19 as well.



Paul’s non-visit to Colossae. Clearly Paul indicates that he had not seen the Colossians, nor the Laodiceans, personally. Did he know anyone in Colossae? Yes, the *Letter to Philemon* clearly indicates that he knew Philemon, who lived at Colossae.⁶ A few individuals are greeted by name at the end of Colossians indicating a prior personal acquaintance, in particular a lady named Νύμφων who led one of the house church groups in Colossae.⁷ Although, as Philemon 22 indicates, Paul was planning a trip to Colossae, he had gotten acquainted with these individuals in both Colossae and Laodicea elsewhere. Very likely it was in Ephesus during the lengthy two year plus ministry there in the mid 50s during the third missionary journey. But in the absence of direct evidence, one can only guess that this was the place.

This same period of ministry, AD 52-57, would have been the only opportunity for Paul to have visited these towns in the Lycus valley east of Ephesus, within the framework of the Acts narrative describing his missionary travels. But for some unexplained reason, Paul did not visit these towns during the period. The ministry there was carried out by Paul’s associates, namely Epaphras and others. And as far as the biblical texts explain, Paul was not ever able to visit Colossae, although he indicated to Philemon that he was

| του Χριστου 81. 1241^s. (1739) *pc* b; Fulg
 | τ. θ. ο εστιν Χριστος D* ar vg^{mss}; Aug
 | τ. θ. του εν Χριστω 33; (Cl) Ambst
 | τ. θ. πατρος του (-^{κ*} 048) Χριστου ^{κ*} A C 048^{vid}. 1175 *pc* (m vg^{st,ww}, sy^p) vg^{mss} sa^{mss} bo
 | τ. θ. και πατ. (° 075. 0208. 0278 *pc*) τ. Χρ. ^{κ²} Ψ 075. 0208. 0278. 365. 945. 1505 *pc* vg^{ms} (bo^{ms})
 | τ. θ. και πατ. και τ. Χρ. D² M (vg^{cl}) sy^{h**}
 | txt P⁴⁶ B vg^{ms}; Hil

Kolossar 2,3

* τις ^{κ²} A D² H 0278 M; Cl (the article τοῦ before θεοῦ is omitted by these manuscripts)
 | txt P⁴⁶ ^{κ*} B C D* Ψ 075. 0208. 33. 1175. 1739. 1881. 2464 *pc*

Kolossar 2,4

* δε ^{κ²} A^c C D Ψ 048. 075. 0208. 0278. 33. 1739. 1881 M lat sy; Cl (the conjunction δὲ is inserted before λέγω)
 | txt P⁴⁶ ^{κ*} A*^{vid} B H 81. 1241^s *pc* m; Ambst Aug

* μη τις ^{κ²} Ψ 075. 0278 M sy; Cl^p (the negative pronoun μηδεις, ‘no one’ is replaced by μη τις, ‘not anyone’)
 | txt ^{κ*} A B C D H P 048. 0208. 33. 81. 326. 365. 1175. 1241^s. 1739. 1881. 2464 *pc*; Cl^p

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 525-26.]

⁶Philm. 1, “Philemon our dear friend and co-worker.” Philm. 19, “I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self.” Philm. 22, “One thing more — prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you.”

That Philemon lived in Colossae is a clear implication of Col. 4:9 that mentions the runaway slave Onesimus coming with the delegation to Colossae bringing the Colossian letter: “he is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.”

⁷Col. 4:15-17 (NRSV): “15 Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. 16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea. 17 And say to Archippus, ‘See that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord.’”

planning to do so.

But Paul's lack of prior direct contact with the church did not diminish his sense of responsibility to it. The writing of the letter becomes the 'substitute presence' of the apostle, and gives him a sense of closeness to the church.

The origin of the false teachers. The teaching of these individuals will be explored in subsequent studies. The question raised here points to a possible origin of these individuals. Were they home town individuals exposed to the different ideas locally? Or, did they travel into Colossae from some other place?

The difficulty here is the limited reference to them in the letter.

In 2:4, Paul simply says, "I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments" (τοῦτο λέγω ἵνα μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς παραλογίζηται ἐν πιθανολογίᾳ).

Then in 2:8, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ" (Βλέπετε μὴ τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν).

Again in 2:16, "Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths" (Μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω ἐν βρώσει ἢ ἐν πόσει ἢ ἐν μέρει ἑορτῆς ἢ νομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων,).

And in 2:18-19, "Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God." (18 μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβευέτω θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων, ἃ ἐόρακεν ἐμβατεῦων, εἰκῆ φυσιοῦμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦς τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ, 19 καὶ οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν, ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα διὰ τῶν ἀφῶν καὶ συνδέσμων ἐπιχορηγούμενον καὶ συμβιβαζόμενον αὔξει τὴν αὔξησιν τοῦ θεοῦ.)

Paul's marking of these individuals is only in generalized terms, μηδεὶς ('no one') and τις ('someone'), and contains no names or direct historical markers. Unlike some other instances in which the opponents of Paul and of the apostolic gospel are named,⁸ no names or such identifying markers are provided here for these individuals in Colossae. This pattern, however, is common in the letters of Paul where he discusses opposition to himself and his gospel.⁹ The apostle prefers to discuss their teaching and their behavior, rather

⁸For example, Bar-Jesus on Paphos (Acts 13:6-10); a Jezebel at Thyatira (Rev. 2:20); Pharisees professing Christianity in Antioch and Jerusalem (Acts 15:1, 5); Diotrophes in 3 John 9-19; Jews from Asia in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27); the unnamed religious leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 23:1ff.); Annias, the high priest, and Tertullus, a lawyer, from Jerusalem in Caesarea Philippi (Acts 24:1-2); the chief priests and leaders of the Jews from Jerusalem in Caesarea Philippi (Acts 25:1-2).

⁹**At Corinth**, Paul's opponents are unnamed: 2 Cor. 10:2, "I ask that when I am present I need not show boldness by daring to oppose *those who think* we are acting according to human standards"; 10:10-12, "For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." 11 Let such people understand that what we say by letter when absent, we will also do when present. 12 We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they do not show good sense."; 11:4-5, "For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. 5 I think that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles."; 11:12-15, "12 And what I do I will also continue to do, in order to deny an opportunity to those who want an opportunity to be recognized as our equals in what they boast about. 13 For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. Their end will match their deeds."; 11:20-23, "20 For you put up with it when someone makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or gives you a slap in the face. 21 To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. 23 Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one: with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death."; 12:11-12, "11 I have been a fool! You forced me to it. Indeed you should have been the ones commending me, for I am not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. 12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works."

Among the Galatians churches they are also unnamed: Gal. 1:7-9, "7 not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!"; 3:1, "1 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified!"; 4:16-17, "16 Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? 17 They make much of you, but for no good purpose; they want to exclude you, so that you may make much of them."; 5:7-9, "7 You were running well; who prevented you from obeying the truth? 8 Such persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. 9 A little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough."; 5:12, "12 I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves!"; 6:12-13, "12 It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised—only

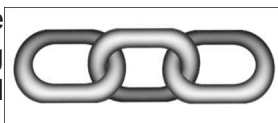
than attack them by name. This is very much the point in the later writings of Paul in the pastoral epistles.¹⁰ However, in 2 Timothy 2:17, Hymenaeus and Philetus are singled out by name as have abandoned the faith in promoting heresy. This tendency to condemn false teachers because of their teaching and their behavior, rather than by name, is also dominant in 2 Peter and Jude.¹¹ Thus what we see in Colossians is very much in line with the tendency of Paul elsewhere, and with other New Testament writers.

Are there any signs pointing to the origin of these false teachers in Colossae? Nothing in the Colossian texts clearly points to whether these people were outsiders or insiders. Modern scholarship increasingly raises concerns about the earlier tendency of labeling all this as ‘heresy,’ or ‘false teaching,’ in the framework of the model of the vigorous confrontation by Paul against his opponents. Colossians does not fit this pattern! The reference to a ‘philosophy’ (φιλοσοφίας) in 2:8 present in Colossae may very well allude to an external non-Christian teaching that was being incorporated into Christian teaching by some of the Colossians. If this assessment is correct, then the likelihood is that the false teaching taking place in the church was ‘home grown’ in the sense of an accommodation of the gospel to influential local understandings about life and reality. Historically, the tendency of scholarship is to view this philosophy as Gnostic, or Proto-Gnostic, in its core emphasis.¹² But in more recent times the consensus of scholarly opinion has moved away from this toward a syncretistic view in which elements of Christianity, Judaism, local pagan religious thinking, and elements of some of the Greek philosophies have come together. The cultural background of the city with its commercial activities encourages such a view. This understanding would favor the ‘home grown’ understanding of the false teaching. Very possibly some members of the various house church groups were applying elements out of their individual pre-Christian religious heritage to their new Christian faith in order to make it easier for them to understand and to live by. Little indication exists to suggest that a well defined system of thinking was brought into Colossae by outsiders.

Literary Aspects:

The literary aspects again play a significant role in understanding the text.

Literary Form: Unquestionably by 2:1 has one reached the letter body. Paul’s use of “I want you to know” (Θέλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι) in 2:1 has often been seen as signaling the beginning of the letter body. To be sure, this ‘disclosure’ formula both in Paul and among other ancient writers of Greek served to signal the introduction of a new theme.



But one can over emphasize this and neglect to pay attention to the connecting conjunction ‘for’ (γὰρ) in the sentence as well. This argues for a much closer link to what preceded in 1:24-29. Much better is to understand 2:1-5 as a continuation of 1:24-29 in terms of providing a rationale for the previous passage.¹³

The passage is clearly autobiographical reflection on ministry by the apostle, and stands as a part of the letter body.

Literary Setting: As the chart below illustrates, Col. 2:1-5 constitutes the second segment of Paul’s

that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh.”

¹⁰Cf. 1 Tim. 4:1-5; 6:2-5; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 4:3-4; Titus 1:10-16.

¹¹Cf. 2 Pet. 2:1-22; Jude 8-19.

¹²Modern scholarship has largely rejected the contention of J. B. Lightfoot in the later 1800s [Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon.*, 8th ed. (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1886), 71–111.] that the ‘heresy’ at Colossae is Proto-Gnostic in nature. Just how much of a problem existed at Colossae is often debated now by scholars, since Colossians contains few of the strident attacks on false teaching found in Galatians and 2 Corinthians, where Paul vigorously defends himself and his gospel against critics. Serious attention has not been given to the older contention that two separate heresies were present at Colossae: Gnostics in 2:11 and Judaizers in 2:16. For a detailed assessment of this see James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 23–35..

¹³James Dunn (*New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 129) quotes Aletti who has observed a chiasmic pattern in the passages 1:24-2:5:

1:24	χαίρω / χαίρων	2:5	A/A’
1:27	γνωρίσαι / ἐπίγνωσι	2:2	B/B’
1:27	πλοῦτος...μυστηρίου	2:2	C/C’
1:29	ἀγωνιζόμενος / ἀγωνα	2:1	D/D’

This pattern ABCD/D’C’B’A’ is at an informal level, but does indicate further connectedness between the two pericopes.

Outline of Colossians

Praescriptio

Introduction: 1:1-2
 Superscriptio: 1:1
 Adscriptio: 1:2a
 Salutatio: 1:2b

Proem

Thankfulness: 1:3-8

Body

Intercession: 1:9-12
 Christus Hymnus: 1:13-20
 Reconciliation: 1:21-23

Paul's Ministry 1: 1:24-29

Paul's Ministry 2: 2:1-5

Christian Living 1: 2:6-15

Christian Living 2: 2:16-19

Christian Legalism: 2:20-23

Seeking the Heavenly Things: 3:1-4

Christian Behavior: 3:5-11

Getting Dressed: 3:12-17

Haustafeln: 3:18-4:1

Husband/Wife: 3:18-19

Father/Children: 3:20-21

Master/Slaves: 3:22-4:1

Admonitions and Requests: 4:2-6

Conclusio

Tychicus: 4:7-9

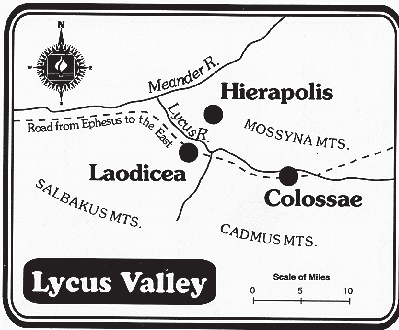
Greetings: 4:10-17

Closing: 4:18

Letter Validation: 4:18a

Prayer Request: 4:18b

Benedictio: 4:19c



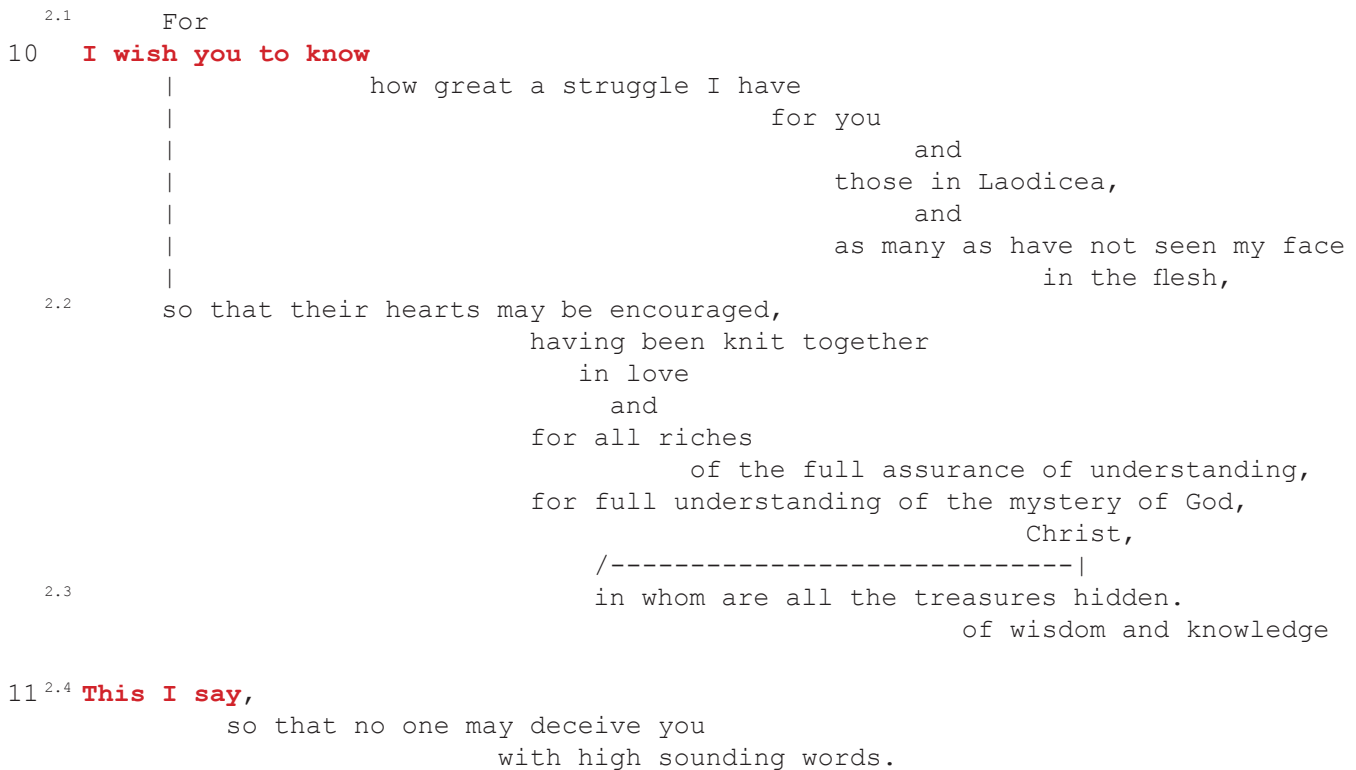
discussion of his ministry, that began in 1:24-29. The two sections are linked together by the causal conjunction γὰρ in 2:1. This has the effect of making 2:1-5 the basis for 1:24-29. Conceptually one can detect this in the more generalized nature of 2:1-5 that includes both Colossae and Laodicea along with other churches in the Lycus valley region in Paul's focus.

Also to be noted is the continuation of the pattern of 'linking' units of material together. Verses 4-5 set up the following discussion in 2:6-15 in a

similar manner observed in the previous pericopes. Failure to note this has led some commentators to incorrectly break the passage at verse 4 or at verse 8.¹⁴ Paul has done that with 1:24-29 and 2:1-5, largely through the use of 'agonize' (ἀγωνιζόμενος, 1:29; ἀγωνία, 2:1). His comments in 2:4-5 lay the foundation then for 2:6-15.

But internally vv. 1-5 with three Greek sentences (vv. 1-3, 4, 5) stand together as a literary unit and are linked internally with several connecting markers, namely τοῦτο in v. 4 and γὰρ in v. 5. Thus they should be considered together as a part of the discussion of ministry.

Literary Structure: The block diagram of the Greek text, literally translated into English in the diagram below, gives visual understanding of the inner connectedness of the statements in 2:1-5. The three sentences clearly stand together in a twofold expression.



^{14c}There is disagreement as to where the main section of the letter begins. Lohmeyer and Gnllka see it beginning at 2:1, despite the continuation of the personal style from 1:24 to 2:5. Others prefer to make the break after 2:3 (e.g., Moule, Harris, Wall). But the τοῦτο λέγω which begins 2:4 is best taken as referring to what has just been said (see particularly Bandstra, "Errorists" 340 and Sappington 177), and 2:4-5, therefore, as the conclusion to the paragraph begun at 1:24." [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 128]

2.5 For
 even if I am absent in the flesh,
 but
 (am present) in spirit
 with you,
 12 **I am rejoicing**
 and
 seeing your order
 and
 the firmness
 of your faith in Christ.

Clearly the text divides itself into two segments, # 10 (vv. 1-3) and #s 11-12 (vv. 4-5). The first (# 10) expresses the extent of Paul's 'struggle' for the churches who do not know him personally, including Colossae and Laodicea. The second segment (#s 11-12) affirms the apostle's motives in this struggle: protecting the churches and rejoicing in their positive stance in the gospel.

Exegesis of the Text:

Struggling for the churches, vv. 1-3:

1 For I want you to know how much I am struggling for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face. 2 I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

2.1 Θέλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ἡλίκον ἀγῶνα ἔχω ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ καὶ ὅσοι οὐχ ἑώρακαν τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ἐν σαρκί, 2 ἵνα παρακληθῶσιν αἱ καρδίαι αὐτῶν, συμβιβασθέντες ἐν ἀγάπῃ καὶ εἰς πᾶν πλοῦτος τῆς πληροφορίας τῆς συνέσεως, εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ, Χριστοῦ, 3 ἐν ᾧ εἰσὶν πάντες οἱ θησαυροὶ τῆς σοφίας καὶ γνῶσεως ἀπόκρυφοι.

Paul uses an expression, "I want you to know," that has a formula pattern called a 'disclosure form.' Dunn notes, "The formulation is a natural one — "I want you to know," "I do not want you to be unaware" — but characteristic of Paul (Rom. 1:13; 11:25; 1 Cor. 10:1; 11:3; 12:1; 2 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thes. 4:13)."¹⁵ Paul is not boasting here. As Dunn suggests,¹⁶ he is moving to reassure the Colossian believers that his concern extends beyond the churches that he had personally founded. Paul's vision was inclusive and not limited to just where he had worked personally.

He experiences an intense struggle (ἡλίκον ἀγῶνα ἔχω) for the churches that he has not personally visited. The language used here¹⁷ (ἡλίκον ἀγῶνα) and also in 1:29 (ἀγωνιζόμενος) often express an athletic metaphor of wrestling in the Olympic games in the ancient world. The apostle used this image several times to express the sustained, intense effort that ministry required: Phil. 1:30; 1 Thess. 2:2; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7. The athletic contest background has sometimes been taken to infer a struggle with false teachers as his opponent, but the metaphor does not of necessity extend itself this far. Rather, it vividly underscores the

¹⁵James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 129.

Also note the observation of Markus Barth: "Paul frequently uses this expression and also its corresponding negative formulation, "I do not want you to know." It often serves to introduce a new theme (see 1 Cor 11:3; 12:1; and 1 Cor 10:1; 1 Thess 4:13), but along with it he expounds previous statements and adds concrete details (cf. Rom 11:25, and Rom 1:13; 2 Cor 1:8) In Col 2:1, it is used in this fashion to expound the preceding remarks." [Markus Barth, Helmut Blanke and Astrid B. Beck, *Colossians: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*. In the *Yale Anchor Bible Commentaries*. (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 270]

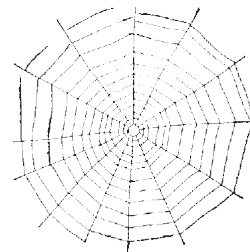
¹⁶"The ups and downs of his relations with the church in Corinth in particular would probably have been familiar to the churches of the Lycus valley, since so much of his time at Ephesus had been spent agonizing over the problems of the Corinthian Christians and his relationships with them (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:8, 10; 2 Cor. 1:23–2:4; 7:8; 12:14). Lest it be inferred that Paul was concerned only for those churches founded by himself, the writer(s) hasten to assure the Colossians that Paul was equally concerned for those churches founded by his associates." [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 129.]

¹⁷The difference between ἡλίκον ἀγῶνα ἔχω and ἀγωνιζόμενος is between saying "how great a struggle I have" and "struggling."

reality that serving the churches involved intense struggle with opposing forces, both inwardly and outwardly. His point here is to stress that this struggle for churches unknown by him personally did not lessen that struggle.¹⁸

The mentioning of the churches by name includes the one at Colossae and also at Laodicea: ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ. Paul had not visited these churches prior to the writing of the letter. He mentions a third group also: “and for all who have not seen me face to face” (καὶ ὅσοι οὐχ ἑώρακαν τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ἐν σαρκί). Most are convinced that this was intended to include other Christian congregations in the Lycus valley region, and in particular Hierapolis, the largest of the three cities.¹⁹ These churches had been planted by Epaphras and other associates of Paul, rather than by the apostle himself. Thus his connection to them was indirect, but none the less very real and personal.

The intention of his disclosure of his struggle for them was simply “so that their hearts may be encouraged” (ἵνα παρακληθῶσιν αἱ καρδίαι αὐτῶν). This expresses the idea of building up their resolve to serve Christ in faithfulness. Then Paul amplifies this intention with the participle expression “having been knitted together in love” (συμβιβασθέντες ἐν ἀγάπῃ). Although the participle has a wide variety of meanings,²⁰ here the idea is the same as in 2:19 picturing a web or a net woven together. The strings that hold the members of the community together are made of love. Their sense of unity has been stitched together by their love for God and for one another. There is profound insight here about the nature of Christian unity and how to achieve it. One should never mistake ‘unity’ for ‘conformity’! Conformity is never achieved by love,



^{18c}“But what was the precise nature of this conflict? Lohmeyer (89, 92) argued that the verb ‘strive’ (ἀγωνιζόμενος), used at verse 29, and the cognate noun ‘conflict’ (ἀγών) were almost technical terms for martyrdom. Accordingly he used these verses to support his thesis that the letter to the Colossians, like that to the Philippians, was permeated with the thought of martyrdom. Paul wrote to the Colossians in conscious awareness of his fate as a martyr. This view, however, has not commended itself to NT scholars. There is no mention in the entire letter to the Colossians (nor in Philippians for that matter) of martyrdom, whether in the case of Paul himself or of his readers. Further, both ἀγών and ἀγωνίζομαι were not used by Paul as technical terms for martyrdom.

“A second view, set forth by Pfitzner (*Paul*, 109–12, 126–29), is to understand Paul’s conflict as his struggle for the gospel or the faith. It involves in the first place untiring toil and labor, an intense wrestling and struggle for the spread, growth and strengthening of the faith as the goal of his mission. Further, the thought of a continual struggle against opposition is not far distant when Paul speaks of his ἀγών. Suffering is often involved so that when he refers to his ‘struggle on your behalf’ this is akin to his statement of verse 24 about his ‘sufferings for your sake’ (παθήματα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν). Others may participate in Paul’s missionary activity. In fact, several passages (Col 4:12, 13; 1 Thess 2:2) reveal an extension of this struggle for the gospel to include the activity of his coworkers as well as to members of a whole congregation (Phil 1:27–30; cf. Rom 15:30–32) facing special trial and of whom it can be said they ‘share the same conflict’ (τὸν αὐτὸν ἀγῶνα ἔχοντες, Phil 1:30). According to Pfitzner’s interpretation, Paul’s conflict is not to be limited to his inner struggles for the sake of his readers, whether it be his intercessory prayers on their behalf (cf. ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν), or his inner turmoil of some kind. Rather, this expenditure of his energies—through his concerns, his prayers (cf. 4:12 regarding Epaphras’ ministry of intercession) and by his letters—are to be understood within the wider struggle for the spread of the gospel and of the faith. His inner conflicts and concerns, then, are part of that wider ἀγών itself.”

[Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 92.]

¹⁹A few manuscript copyists (104. 424 pc vg^{ms} sy^{h**}) sought to make this clear by inserting καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἱεραπόλει (and those in Hierapolis) after Λαοδικείᾳ. This evidently came from the desire to make 2:1 conform to the similar reference in 4:13, ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἱεραπόλει.

^{20c}“**συμβιβάζω** fut. συμβιβάσω, Att. συμβιβῶ Ps 31:8; 1 aor. συνεβίβασα, pass. ptc. συμβιβασθεῖς (βιβάζω ‘cause to go’; Hdt. et al.; ins, LXX).

1. to bring together into a unit, unite

a. lit., of the body, which is *held together by sinews, ligaments, joints* τὸ σῶμα συμβιβαζόμενον διὰ πάσης ἀφῆς **Eph 4:16** (GWhitaker, JTS 31, 1930, 48f); cp. **Col 2:19**.

b. fig. *unite, knit together* (Hdt. 1, 74; Thu. 2, 29, 6; Pla., Prot. 337e) pass. συμβιβασθέντες ἐν ἀγάπῃ **Col 2:2** (so Lghtf. et al., NRSV. But s. 4 below).

2. to draw a conclusion in the face of evidence, conclude, infer (Pla., Hipp. Min. 369d, Rep. 6, 504a) **Ac 16:10** (w. ὅτι foll.).

3. to present a logical conclusion, demonstrate, prove (Aristot., Top. 7, 5, 150a, 36 [ὅτι]; 8, 3, 154b, 27; 8, 11, 157b, 37; Iambl., Vi. Pyth. 13, 60) συμβιβάζων ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Χριστός **Ac 9:22**.

4. to advise by giving instructions, instruct, teach, advise τινά someone (LXX) **1 Cor 2:16 (Is 40:13f); Ac 19:33** (vv. ll. προεβίβασαν, κατεβίβασαν; diff. PLampe, BZ 36, ’92, 72–74).—Some (e.g. MDibelius, Mft.) classify **Col 2:2** here (s. 1b above).—DELG s.v. βιβάζω. M-M. s.v. συμβιβάζω. TW.

[William Arndt, 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), 956–57.]

only by coercion. Unity can never be achieved by coercion, only by love.

The objective of this encouragement is stated in two ways: 1) “so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding” (καὶ εἰς πᾶν πλοῦτος τῆς πληροφορίας τῆς συνέσεως); and 2) “have the knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ himself” (εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ, Χριστοῦ). The first expression stacks nouns on top of one another with very similar meaning, seemingly to stress intensity.²¹ The encouragement with the bonding of love is intended to open the door to infinitely greater understanding of the certainty of our faith experience of Christ. Paul was anxious that the believers come into a realization of the pluses that come out of the full assurance of their religious experience in Christ. With developing unity comes profound understanding of the deeper blessings of spiritual insight.

The second objective grows out of the first, that they develop a full understanding of the ‘mystery’ of God. Earlier in 1:26 Paul spoke of “the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints.” This mystery is then in 1:27 defined in terms of “how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Paul’s commission from God is to make this mystery known to the Gentiles, 1:28-29. Thus the repeating of the terms here in 2:2 reaffirms the definition of the divine mystery, it is Christ. He alone is that formerly hidden message of salvation for the Gentiles that now is being proclaimed to them. Paul’s encouragement to the Colossians is intended to help them develop a full knowledge of this mystery.

The reference to Christ at the end of verse two prompts an expansion by way of a relative clause in verse three: “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (ἐν ᾧ εἰσιν πάντες οἱ θησαυροὶ τῆς σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως ἀπόκρυφοι.). Whereas in 1:27 Christ was the ‘hope of glory,’ now Christ is the store house of all the valuable wisdom and knowledge from God. The hiddenness of this heavenly wisdom and knowledge is not that it belongs to individuals who have some kind of special revelatory experience after conversion. Not at all! This understanding of the things of God is found in Christ and in Him becomes known. Conversion to Christ by the Gentiles opens the door to the treasures of this knowledge. For the Gentiles such knowledge of God through Christ was indeed a treasure above all treasures! As Paul declared in the doxological praise of Romans 11:33-36:

33 O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” 35 “Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?” 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

33 Ὡς βάθος πλοῦτου καὶ σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως θεοῦ· ὡς ἀνεξεραύνητα τὰ κρίματα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνεξιχνίαστοι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ. 34 Τίς γὰρ ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου; ἢ τίς σύμβουλος αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο; 35 ἢ τίς προέδωκεν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἀνταποδοθήσεται αὐτῷ; 36 ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα· αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.

The esoteric language used by Paul in 2:1-5 does point to a polemical intention. But in spite of Lightfoot’s failed effort to see this as anti-gnostic polemic by Paul, the apostle is clearly targeting a false teaching at Colossae that made use of these esoteric terms like ‘mystery,’ ‘fullness,’ ‘knowledge,’ etc. The nature of this

²¹“in order to gain all the abounding fullness of understanding (literally: and for the entire riches of the fullness of understanding). The declaration that begins here is directly dependent on the verb *parakaleō*. This syntactic connection is made possible by *kai* (and), which has an explanatory function here (‘and that is’). If *kai* had not been inserted here, this statement would be directly attached to ‘held together in love.’ *kai* also has an emphatic function. The phrase ‘and namely’ in front of the remaining expressions, which refers to 1:26, adds an emphasis that urges the reader to infer that the purpose of the battle of the apostle for the Colossians is identical with his basic mission to proclaim the revealed mystery.

“The string of genitive attributes (compare 1:5f.; 1:27) and of the (almost) synonymous concepts later on (cf. esp. 1:9–11) renders the meaning of this passage more difficult. In addition, the concept *plērophoria* is attested only occasionally and our knowledge of its spectrum of meaning is correspondingly uncertain. Its literal meaning is ‘greatest fullness.’ In extra-Christian literature it is found only with the meaning ‘certainty.’ It does not occur at all in the LXX, and in the NT besides Col 2:2 only in 1 Thess 1:5, Heb 6:11, and 10:22. Even in these three passages the meaning of *plērophoria* is not unequivocal. We can translate ‘certainty’ there, but also ‘fullness.’ Is *plērophoria* in Col 2:2 now a tautological concept for ‘all riches’ or does the strengthening that is the topic of this verse extend to mean an exceedingly great certainty?

“The context gives some clues to the solution to this problem. In 2:3, the object of understanding is described more closely. In it are hidden *all* (!) the treasures of wisdom and understanding. It is obvious that this description of the object of understanding is supposed to correspond to the description of its understanding. We need to observe also that the contextual connection of the concepts ‘all treasures’ and ‘all riches’ points toward the fact that *ploutos* (riches) is the determining concept of the expression in 2:2. Accordingly, *plērophoria* should probably be translated by ‘fullness.’” [Markus Barth, Helmut Blanke and Astrid B. Beck, *Colossians: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*. In the *Yale Anchor Bible Commentaries*. (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 276–277.]

will become clearer in the study of 2:6-15 in the next lesson.

Motives behind the struggle, vv. 4-5:

4 I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments. 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ.”

4 τοῦτο λέγω ἵνα μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς παραλογίζηται ἐν πιθανολογίᾳ. 5 εἰ γὰρ καὶ τῆ σαρκὶ ἄπειμι, ἀλλὰ τῷ πνεύματι σὺν ὑμῖν εἰμι, χαίρων καὶ βλέπων ὑμῶν τὴν τάξιν καὶ τὸ στερέωμα τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν πίστεως ὑμῶν.

The polemical²² intention of Paul comes to the surface in verse four. The apostle was deeply concerned that the Colossians not become vulnerable to false teaching that distorted the gospel of Christ. The methods of these teachers was “plausible arguments” (ἐν πιθανολογίᾳ). A play on words is present in the Greek that can’t be preserved in translation: μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς παρα**λογίζ**ηται ἐν πιθανο**λογί**ᾳ. Literally, ‘that no one out word you with high sounding words.’ The appeal of these teachers was to offer reasonable sounding arguments for their view, but in accepting such reasoning the Colossians would be tricked into adopting something false.²³ One could wish that Paul would have included an example so that we could have a better understanding of how these people reasoned. In the subsequent pericope of 2:6-15, we will learn of some of the points of this teaching, but little about how this misleading teaching was made persuasive with specific arguments. Paul simply indicates his desire to insulate the Colossians from such nonsense! The best counter offensive was for the Colossians to realize fully what they already had in Christ as the revealed mystery of God. This would diffuse the influence of this misleading arguments.

The second point that Paul emphasizes comes in verse five with a powerful affirmation of the steadfastness of the Colossians in the apostolic gospel. Even though not able to be present among the Colossians and witness first hand where they were standing, the reports of Epaphras to him had given him confidence that the Colossians possessed “your morale” (ὑμῶν τὴν τάξιν) and “the firmness of your faith in Christ” (τὸ στερέωμα τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν πίστεως ὑμῶν).²⁴ A source of rejoicing for Paul was coming to understand their orderly

²²Merriam-Webster online dictionary: “polemic: an aggressive attack on or refutation of the opinions or principles of another.”

²³“so that no one may delude you with specious arguments. Parologizer has literally means “to miscalculate.” It is frequently used in Greek, although not exclusively, of deceitful and misleading actions. In the LXX, however, the verb always has this negative connotation. The sense of deception is described rather graphically in the OT accounts, as when Laban substitutes the wrong daughter as the bride to his unwitting future son-in-law and thus detains him for further years of service (Gen 29:25), or when the Gibeonites disguise themselves as travelers from afar and thus seal a friendship agreement with Joshua (Josh 9:22). In the Pauline corpus, the verb is used only here, and elsewhere in the NT only in Jas 1:22.

pithanologia occurs in the entire NT only in Col 2:4 and it also does not occur in the LXX. In classical Greek it often designates a judgment based on probabilities as opposed to an irrefutable (mathematical) proof which is designated by *apodeixis*. *Pithanologia*, which has the root meaning of ‘reasons of probability,’ is used in the papyri in the negative sense of ‘probable reasons.’ This meaning probably also applies to Col 2:4.” [Markus Barth, Helmut Blanke and Astrid B. Beck, *Colossians: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*. In the *Yale Anchor Bible Commentaries*. (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 279.]

²⁴“χαίρων καὶ βλέπων κτλ. These words indicate by way of summary how the Colossian community was faring, and the description is a positive one. The two participles χαίρων and βλέπων are best taken together and rendered “rejoicing to see” (with Bengel 2, 459, Robertson, *Grammar*, 426, 427, BD^f para. 471[5], etc, against Meyer, 347, who considers that χαίρων refers to Paul’s joy at the fact that he is with them spiritually, while βλέπων adds to the thought by indicating what is perceived). Obviously because of Paul’s physical absence βλέπω is used figuratively meaning ‘perceive,’ ‘note’ (cf Rom 7:23; 2 Cor 7:8; Heb 2:9; 10:25).

“Two interesting terms are employed in this positive description of the church’s condition: τάξις (‘order’) and στερέωμα (‘firmness,’ ‘steadfastness’), both of which could appear in military contexts, the former denoting the positions which soldiers occupy (cf Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.2.18; the Qumran community called itself a camp and its order was to be maintained at all costs: 1QS 10:25; cf 4:4; 1QM 3:1, where the Hebrew equivalent of τάξις is used; cf Bertram, *TDNT* 7, 614), the latter describing a bulwark or fortification (1 Macc 9:14; cf Bertram, *TDNT* 7, 609–14). So some have pressed the military metaphor in this context. For Lohmeyer, “The apostle is ‘with them’ as a field commander standing before his troops and arranging the ranks for battle once more” (95), while Martin (NCB, 76, 77) interprets the words of Paul to mean that he viewed with approval their steadfast intent to close ranks and stand firm, without yielding to erroneous propaganda from an intruding enemy (cf Moule, 89).

“An examination of the different occurrences of these two terms in a variety of contexts (Classical Greek writers, the LXX, papyri and patristic material) shows that from earliest times τάξις and στερέωμα did not necessarily have a military nuance but only assume one from their respective contexts (Abbott, 243; cf Dibelius-Greeven, 26; the lexicons of BAG, MM, Hatch and Redpath, and Lampe draw attention to a variety of instances where there is no military meaning). Further, the context here does not suggest the positioning of troops for battle. Both concepts are employed in a more general sense so that τάξις denotes the well-ordered Christian behavior of the community (cf 1 Cor 14:40) which previously had not been disturbed by sectarian divisions nor forsaken by its readers, while στερέωμα describes the ‘firmness’ or solidarity of their faith in Christ (τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν πίστεως ὑμῶν; cf Acts 16:5; 1 Peter 5:9). This faith, which was dynamic in character (cf Bultmann, *TDNT* 6, 212, who correctly points out that πίστις can fre-

behavior and their firmness in their personal faith in Christ. This was in spite of his absence from their midst. Thus much confidence in the Colossians to not be led astray by the false teaching floating around there is expressed by Paul.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

How does this word of Paul to the Colossians reach across time to apply to us today? Numerous insights emerge from these verses. First relates to the core expressions in the first sentence in vv. 1-3. Pastoral ministry that genuinely cares for the spiritual welfare of a congregation involves struggle. And not a shallow or momentary struggle. This Paul made clear to the Colossians regarding his concern for them. This struggle is both internal (emotional, spiritual etc.) and external (spending time and efforts in ministering to). Some times we may not appreciate adequately the efforts of our spiritual leaders in seeking to care for us. As spiritual leaders we should take the model of the apostle here very seriously. We exist to help others, not the other way around!

Also from this first sentence comes deep insights in the nature of Christian unity and how to achieve it in church life. Deep passionate love for God and for one another is the key to bringing God's people together in true unity. This is not conformity, but the sharing of common devotion that binds us together with all our diversity in unified service to Christ. An important aspect of this unity is a deepening of our spiritual understanding into the enormous riches of our relationship with Christ.

In the second and third sentences (vv. 4-5), we come to understand that such unity is essential to help prevent us from being betrayed by false teaching and teachers into adopting a perverted view of the Gospel. Paul will, in subsequent passages, dissect some of the details of this false teaching in exposing its twisting of the true Gospel. But here he alerts us to the danger of drifting into such false understanding. The strategy of these false teachers at Colossae of using persuasive language that sounded 'smart' and appealing in order to lead people astray is still employed in our world by false teachers today.

One final implication relates to the structure and order present in the Colossian believers growing out of their faith commitment to Christ (cf. v. 5). Authentic faith in Christ moves God's people forward in an orderly fashion, rather than into disorder and chaos. Where such is present, false teachings are dominating a church rather than authentic faith in Christ.

- 1) How do you see ministry?

- 2) How closely knit together in love is our church?

- 3) How much wisdom in the things of God do you have?

- 4) How easily led astray by false teaching are you?

quently denote the living and dynamic aspect of faith rather than the mere fact of it, for example, 2 Cor 10:15; Phil 1:25) was firmly founded because it was directed to Christ alone (εἰς Χριστόν), and as long as they held fast to him no temptation would overcome them. Well might Paul be joyful (χαίρων) as he was given this description by Epaphras of the believing community at Colossae.

"The praise given to the congregation suggests that, although it was troubled by false teachers (who were hardly an external threat only, as W. Foerster, "Die Irrlehrer des Kolosserbriefes," *Studia Biblica et Semitica. Prof. Th. C. Vriezen dedicata* Wageningen: Veenman and Zonen, 1966] 72, 73, and Lähnemann, *Kolosserbrief* 43, indicate), the church was still basically sound in the faith, preserving the apostolic message and persisting in it. The heresy had not achieved anything like real success (cf 2:4, 8, 20) though it may well have encroached on a section of the Christians, threatening to disrupt others. On the basis of their adherence to the apostolic gospel, with its center being Christ Jesus as Lord, the apostle is now able to attack the heresy which has been enticingly presented (v 4)." [Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 99]