

Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (11)
The Heart of a True Minister (part two)
(Col. 2:1-5)

Last Lord's Day we began to address the paragraph contained in Colossians 2:1-5. Paul was autobiographical in these few words, expressing to the church at Colossae the matters upon his heart for their well-being and growth in Christian maturity. Let us read again Colossians 2:1-5:

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, ²that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. ⁵For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

The outline we proposed for these verses is as follows:

- I. A true minister has love and concern for his people. (2:1)
- II. A true minister has true spiritual concerns for his people. (2:2-4)
- III. A true minister of the gospel longs for and rejoices when he sees in his people good discipline and stability in faith in Christ. (2:5)

Even though a direct application of this passage may be seen for ministers or for guidance to those who desire to become ministers of the gospel, we can see here in Paul's words quite clearly the kinds of desires and goals that we should have for our congregation. We have already addressed the statement of verse 1, in which we see that *a faithful minister has a genuine love and concern for his people*. And then last week we considered verses 2 through 4 in which we see that *a true minister* (who is thinking and serving rightly) *has true spiritual concerns for his people*.

Paul's concerns for these people were spiritual concerns. There are four identified for us. He struggled (1) so as their hearts would be encouraged (2:2a), (2) in that they had been knit together in love (2:2b), (3) that they would experience full assurance of their standing before God in Christ (2:2c-3), and (4) that they may be preserved from errant teaching (2:4).

Today we give our attention to the second concern Paul had for this church, in that...

II. A true minister has true spiritual concerns for his people (2:2-4), including his teaching them that...

2. They had been "knit together in love"

Paul wrote, "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, ²that their hearts may be encouraged, *being knit together in love*." The apostle Paul desired that these Christians, whom he had never met face to face, would have the hearts encouraged. The apostle then described the specific manner in which this encouragement is produced. They had been "knit together in love."

The verb in this clause, "knit together", is actually a participle, a verbal adjective. Specifically it is an aorist passive participle. What this means in simple terms is that the Lord, in order to encourage His people, caused His people to have been knit together in love. When the Lord brought us to salvation, He knit our hearts with another in love. And when we see afresh the reality and implication of this spiritual truth, we

may be encouraged in the Lord. There is a source of encouragement for the people of God when they realize they are numbered among the people of God, who are loved by God.

The Greek word translated “knit together” is found in this form only here in all of the New Testament. However, there are a few places where the word is used in a different form. For example we read the word in Ephesians 4:15 and 16. Below are two translations for these verses. The first reading is the New King James Version (NKJV); the second reading is the English Standard Version (ESV).

Ephesians 4:15. “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head-- Christ-- ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and *knit together* by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

Ephesians 4:15. “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and *held together* by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

The use of the verb in this verse, in distinction from the word in our verse, is in the present tense. Here in Ephesians 4:15 Paul describes what God is presently doing among His people. He is causing their hearts to be “knit together.” The participle in our text of Colossians 2:2, however, is in a tense (aorist) that suggests God had done this upon our initial conversion to Jesus Christ. The point is this: when we were converted, God established us together, having joined us together in love as the people of God. This should be a basis of encouragement to us when we understand the importance and the implications of this spiritual reality.

The word carries a different nuance in several other places in Scripture. It was used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (LXX) in **Isaiah 40:13** and **14**, which reads,

Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has taught Him? ¹⁴With whom did He take counsel, and who *instructed* Him, and taught Him in the path of justice? Who *taught* Him knowledge, and showed Him the way of understanding?

The words translated as “instructed” and “taught” are the same word translated as “knit together” in our text, albeit in different forms. These verses in Isaiah 40 are quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:16, which reads, “For ‘who has known the mind of the LORD that he may *instruct* Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.” And so, some believe that our text, Colossians 2:2 should be translated as “instructed” rather than “knit together.” But this may not suggest a great divergence of interpretation of our verse from what have already shown. Paul may be stating the truth he has asserted in other places, that God Himself as “instructed”, or “knit together” our hearts in love, not only for Him, but for one another as His church, His people. For example, we read his words in 1 Thessalonians 4:9, “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, *for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.*”

Love is the true mark of the true Christian. This is in contrast to the false teachers influencing the Christians in the church at Colossae, who emphasized “knowledge”, as they defined it, as the true mark of one of their followers. Paul set forth the love of God and love for the brethren as the preeminent issue at hand. This is a matter touching their hearts, the very center of their being. Here are **William Hendriksen’s** words,

The purpose of Paul’s striving is: **in order that their hearts may be strengthened.** The *heart* of all true pastoral activity is to be an instrument in God’s hand to bring the *hearts* of those entrusted to one’s care to the *heart* of Christ. The reason is this: once a man’s heart has been thoroughly won over and established in grace, the entire person has become the object of God’s marvelous transforming power, for the heart is the fulcrum of feeling and faith as well as the mainspring of words and actions (Rom. 10:10; cf. Matt. 12:34; 15:19; 22:37; John 14:1). It is the core and center of man’s being, man’s inner most self. “Out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). “Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks upon the heart” (1 Sm. 16:7). Over against the attack of the false teachers these hearts

must be *strengthened*. In unity there is strength; hence the continuation is: **they themselves being wielded together in love**. Not *knowledge*, certainly not conceit (see Col. 2:18), but *mutual love* is the “bond of perfection” (Col. 3:14). Such love springs directly from the heart of God in Christ and leads back to Him, for God is love (1 John 4:8). Now when believers, wielded together in love, are confronted with the danger of errors and lies, let them unitedly pray about this and discuss it among each other on the basis of God’s special revelation (Cf. Eph. 3:17-19), **and this with a view to all the riches of assured understanding**. Thorough, rich, gratifying *insight* (see Col. 1:9; cf. 1 Cor. 1:19; Eph. 3:4; 2 Tim. 2:7) into spiritual matters, which implies the ability to distinguish the true from the false, must ever be the goal. Even more definitely this goal is expressed in the words: **with a view to the clear knowledge of the mystery of God, namely Christ.**¹

Paul knew that these Christians in this church at Colossae, would be greatly encouraged when they came to see that God had “knit together” their hearts one to another and to Him.

The third spiritual concern upon Paul’s heart for these Christians was that...

3. They would experience full assurance of their standing before God in Christ (2:2b-3)

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face,² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, **to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ,³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**

Paul desired that they would be able “to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery...” Let us consider what the apostle was suggesting.

a. **First**, there are great “*riches of full assurance*.” Full assurance speaks of the settled and sound confidence that one is right with God and secure before God with respect to salvation. Full assurance is desirable. The writer to the Hebrews wrote, “And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to **the full assurance** of hope until the end” (Heb. 6:11).

Some have taught that assurance of salvation in this life is not possible or desirable. This was the teaching of Rome set forth in the 17th century at the Council of Trent (AD 1563). It was here that Rome’s teaching about assurance was articulated which remains to this present day. At Trent Rome declared the impossibility of assurance of salvation. In Trent’s statement about justification, it said:

No one, moreover, as long as he is in this mortal life, ought so far to presume as regards the secret mystery of divine predestination, as to determine for certain that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate; as if it were true, that he is justified, either cannot sin any more, or if he do sin, that he ought to promise himself an assured repentance; for except by special revelation, it cannot be known whom God hath chosen to eternal life.

Also, **Trent** stated:

Let no one herein promise himself anything as certain with an absolute certainty; though all ought to place and repose a most firm hope in God’s help.

What was the result? No assurance was possible for the one that follows Rome’s teaching. This remains true today as well. Five conclusions about assurance of salvation came forth from the Council of Trent which is true of Catholicism today:

¹ William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Baker, Academic, 1964), p. 103f.

(1) Assurance of salvation was only possible in rare cases through special revelation from God, which was only experienced by martyr-saints or eminent ascetics, or among those who lived monastic lives.

(2) For the ordinary believer the maximum level of certainty obtainable was a moral probability or “a firm hope in God’s help,” since even a mature believer could not be certain of final perseverance.

(3) Even if assurance were possible for the ordinary believer, it would not be desirable. Roman Catholicism considered it

Wholesome and beneficial for the Christian to entertain honest doubts in the high matters of justification and salvation. Such doubts keep him from an overwhelming confidence in himself, minister in true humility of character, and serve in a more salutary restraint on evil passions than joy and peace could ever be.”²

Roman Catholicism believes it is damaging to a Christian to have assurance of salvation.

(4) Trent confirms that the doctrine of assurance cannot be sustained by a theology built on sacramental grace. In other words, if your salvation is dependent on grace given to you by the church through observing many various duties and efforts over the course of a lifetime, you can never be assured in this life that you have salvation.

(5) The effect of a lack of assurance make individuals under Rome’s teaching feel themselves dependent upon the church as God’s way of channelling saving grace to the sinner.³

This last inevitable conclusion is what led to the great break between Rome and the Protestant Reformers of the 16th and 17th centuries. The Protestants argued against church authority for the superior and final authority of the Scriptures. Much of the Protestant Reformation involved the nature of true assurance of salvation in contrast to the teaching of Roman Catholicism.⁴

Rome says that you, the ordinary believer, cannot nor should you have assurance of salvation. It teaches that it would not be desirable if you could have assurance, for it would cause you to become careless and sinful. God’s Word declares,

¹¹And this is the testimony: that *God has given us eternal life*, and this life is in His Son. ¹²*He who has the Son has life*; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life*, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

Assurance of salvation is desirable and readily available for the one who truly has Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Full assurance should be desirable by all, but sadly, it is not experienced by all. In fact what is sadder is that there are many who believe themselves to be assured of salvation, when their hope is based on nothing solid. This is a major problem with much of evangelicalism. And so, though we would fault Rome because

² Louis Berkof, *Assurance of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Smitten Book, 1928), p. 22.

³ These five conclusions are from Joel Beeke’s excellent book, *The Quest for Full Assurance; the Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Carlisle, PA, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999) pp. 14f.

⁴ Ibid. Beeke summarized the matter as it stood between Rome and the early Reformers: “The effect of this lack of assurance made individuals feel dependent upon the church as God’s peculiar channel of divine grace, so that the issue between Roman Catholicism and the Reformers was essentially one of ecclesiastical authority pitted against scriptural authority. Thus the situation became ripe for a reaction on the part of the Protestant Reformers in support of a scriptural and personal quest of assurance of salvation.”

it denies assurance to almost everybody, we fault evangelicalism because it claims assurance to almost everybody for the slimmest of reasons.

We covered this subject on assurance in a nine part series in the late summer of 2007. It was a very important study that I would encourage us all to be familiar. When we opened that series, we set forth some matters to which may now give our attention:

A study of assurance of salvation is one of great importance and of some difficulty. I do not think that it is hard to see the *importance* of this subject. To know that one is the recipient of God's salvation, to know that God is for you and not against you, is of great importance. It really is the foundation, the spring from which all peace and joy flow. It is also the source of legitimate motivation for living the Christian life. Much of what we do and much of how we react to situations in the world are to responses from people who know that God is for them, that their sins are forgiven them, that they know God who loves them, is with them, and will secure to them every good thing. The one who serves God without true assurance will do so out of a sense of doubt and terror, and out of a sense of reluctant servitude rather than joyful love.

It may be more difficult to see the *difficulty* of the subject of assurance, for assurance is often seen to be an easy thing to acquire and maintain. What we will attempt to show is that assurance of one's own salvation is not as easy a thing to acquire as most assume it to be. One reason of difficulty in obtaining true assurance is because of the ease in which people may gain false assurance and the difficulty in dispelling false assurance. The facts are these:

(1) *There are some who have a true assurance of salvation and they should have.* This is because they examined the biblical teaching respecting these things, and have passed the tests in their own conscience regarding their condition. (I think these are much fewer in number as is generally assumed.)

(2) *There are some who are true Christians, who do not have assurance of salvation, but they should have.*

(3) *There are many in this world who have assurance of salvation, but they should not have.* They have no legitimate biblical grounds for assurance, for God's Word says of them that they are without hope and without God.

(4) *There are some who are true Christians, who have assurance, but the basis of their assurance is faulty.* They may have a right to true assurance, but they are basing their assurance on the wrong things.

(5) *There are those who have assurance, but it is of a weak nature, sometimes they feel assured but at other times they quite despair of their condition.*

An understanding of the biblical teaching of assurance of salvation will help us in bringing others to Jesus Christ. Much of the work of witnessing involves convincing people who have false assurance of salvation that it is false. Proverbs 30:12 still holds true, "There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness." The fact that so many people err in this matter means they need to be taught rightly. Much of the devil's hold on people in their sins is their false reasoning that they are okay anyway. Much of spiritual warfare is the "casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Many of these "arguments" that we must dispel are bases for false assurance of salvation.

Some might be troubled by these words, but the matter is extremely important. And although we would never want to deny assurance to a believer when there is a sound basis of hope built upon the Scriptures, we would cast down, if we could, every false hope in order for that should to seek and obtain true salvation and a sound assurance that comes based on biblical truth. And although speaking in this manner may result in some doubting, this is not necessarily a bad thing if it results in a sound hope obtained. For as we have repeated many times, Spurgeon's words are true,

The greatest blessing is to have true assurance of salvation.

The second greatest blessing is doubt your salvation, for the second will lead to the first.

The Lord Jesus said to some who were righteous in their own eyes, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” Most people falsely think they are “well” in their relationship with God. We are to show them that they are not, so that they will seek Christ.

Our confession of faith states the matter of both false assurance and true assurance.

Although temporary believers, and other unregenerate men, may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God and state of salvation, which hope of theirs shall perish; yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed. (Art. 18, par. 1, Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689)

The Scripture verses the confession cite include Job 8 in which those with false assurance are addressed:

Job 8:13-15. “So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hope of the godless man shall perish: ¹⁴Whose confidence shall break in sunder, and whose trust is a spider’s web. ¹⁵He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand: He shall hold fast thereby, but it shall not endure.”

In addition the words of our Lord Jesus are referenced.

Matthew 7:22-23. “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? ²³ And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

But then the confession also cites verses that teach that true assurance is possible.

1 John 2:3. “And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.”

1 John 3:14. “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

1 John 3:18f. “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.”

1 John 3:21. “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.”

1 John 3:24. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”

1 John 5:13. “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”

Romans 5:1-5. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that

tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom 5:1 NKJ)

b. **Second**, not only are there are great “riches of full assurance”, *these riches of full assurance lie in “understanding and knowledge.”* This understanding and knowledge must be based upon the revelation of God’s truth in the Holy Scriptures. The Bible alone teaches us how we can have a sound assurance of salvation. And in doing so, the Scriptures reveal **three ways** that God gives true assurance of salvation.

(1) **First**, God may give assurance of salvation through **believing and trusting the promises of the Scripture**. For example, Jesus said, “All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and him that comes to me I will in **no wise cast out**” (John 6:37). Because the Lord has given someone the “light” to understand His promise, and he feels that promises applies to him, that believer may be granted assurance of salvation by God.

(2) **Second**, God may give true assurance of salvation through the subjective experience of peace that the Holy Spirit may impart to the true Christian. This is a **subjective** basis of assurance that is unverifiable by others. There is an assurance that God Himself gives to His own, an assurance that is produced and sustained, and renewed in those times of personal spiritual decline and hardening. It is a personal, spiritual sense of peace or well-being that the Holy Spirit gives to the soul. Several verses may be cited that speak to this.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-5. ²We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, ³remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, ⁴knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. ⁵For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, **and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance**, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

Romans 8:12-17. ¹²Therefore, brethren, we are debtors -- not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵**For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.”** ¹⁶**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,** ¹⁷and if children, then heirs -- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

It was **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones** who believed that this subjective assurance of the Holy Spirit is the greatest and strongest “form of assurance” that a believer may have. I read where a well-known Puritan, however, thought that this was the least certain form of assurance that a person might claim for himself.

(3) The **third** way God gives true assurance of salvation is when the Christian is able to pass **the tests of the Scriptures** that distinguish true Christians from all other.

With respect to this third way that God gives assurance, passing the tests of Scripture, the little Epistle of First John sets forth **three kinds of tests** by which a true Christian may be identified. By these three tests we may examine ourselves as to whether or not we may legitimately have assurance of salvation. These three tests are as follows:

1. The test of the faith – which addresses the content of what you believe. We might say that this is the doctrinal test; it is in the sphere of the mind, or intellect.
2. The test of fellowship – This concerns whom you love. Do you truly love God? Do you truly love God’s people? This is the test of one’s affections; it is in the sphere of the heart.

3. The test of life – This is the issue about how you live. This is the practical test. It is the test of righteousness; it is in the sphere of acting, reacting, and relating to people, to things, and to situations that we encounter in life.

You must be able to pass all three tests if you are to have a clean bill of health. To fail in one test, is fatal to assurance. Imagine you have a strange and growing pain in your abdomen. It becomes a concern for you. You go to your physician. He looks you over. He says, “Let’s take an x-ray of you to see if that test might reveal anything.” He says, “You look fine to me.” But perhaps we should do some blood work to see if that test reveals a problem. And so he takes some blood and sends it out for a thorough blood test. You return to him. He says to you, “I do not see anything wrong with you. You have a clear bill of health as far as I can see. Nevertheless, I think that we will send you for an ultra sound, for sometimes that will reveal a condition that is not made obvious through other means.” And so, that is done. You return, and he says, “We have found the problem. It is such and such...” False assurance is bolstered by either not submitting to examination, or not submitting to thorough examination. You may pass *the test of the faith*; you are no *heretic*.

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

You may pass *the test of life*; you are no *hypocrite*.

³*Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.* ⁴*He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.* ⁵But whoever *keeps His word*, truly the love of God is perfected in him. *By this we know that we are in Him.* (1 John 2:3-5)

But if you fail *the test of fellowship*, your case is hopeless, unless you repent and turn to Christ for cleansing and forgiveness of sin.

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. (1 John 4:21f):

In fact to fail any of the tests is to reveal that in your present condition, unless you repent of your sin, you will die and be damned by God forever. Thankfully, there is true and full assurance to the child of God. But it belongs to those who have seriously and earnestly examined themselves and have found that God has indeed done and is doing a work of saving grace in their lives. As our confession states. True assurance belongs

- to those who *truly* believe in the Lord Jesus,
- to those who love him in sincerity,
- to those who endeavor to walk in all good conscience before Him.
- they may in this life enjoy assurance
- they may be assured that they will be glorified one day.
- their hope shall never be disappointed; they will stand unashamed before God one day.

c. As we return to our text, we see *third*, that the “understanding and knowledge”, which bring forth great riches of assurance, are *in the person of Jesus Christ*.

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, ²that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to

reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge *of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

The heretics who were influencing the Christians in the church at Colossae claimed that they were promoters of a “mystery religion.” They told the people that they had inside information into the god or goddess they worshipped. This information was a “mystery” to everyone else. But to initiates into their religion they imparted their secret information, which was a “mystery”, promising they would then have power to influence and control their god to their advantage.

But here Paul tells his readers that “God’s mystery” is Jesus Christ. It is in Him alone all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge may be acquired. This knowledge in Christ was “hidden”, not that it could not be recovered, for just the opposite was true. Through Jesus Christ these hidden riches may be uncovered and recovered.

The meaning, therefore, is, that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in Christ — by which he means, that we are perfect in wisdom if we truly know Christ, so that it is madness to wish to know anything besides Him. For since the Father has manifested himself wholly in Him, that man wishes to be wise apart from God, who is not contented with Christ alone.

Should any one choose to interpret it as referring to the *mystery*, the meaning will be, that all the wisdom of the pious is included in the gospel, by means of which God is revealed to us in his Son.⁵

As we return to our text of Colossians 2:1-5, we read that a minister of the gospel must have the spiritual concern for his people...

4. That they may be preserved from errant teaching (2:4)

Paul wrote,

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, ²that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ***⁴I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.***

A minister possesses no true love for his people if he is not concerned about error being propagated among his people. A true minister of Christ preaches the truth of God clearly and plainly, for he knows this is most beneficial for them. Paul could say to the elders at Ephesus of his faithful ministry among them:

“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰***how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable***, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:18-21)

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth declaring:

But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but ***by manifestation of the truth*** commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (2 Cor. 4:2)

⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Baker Book House), vol. 21, p. 15.

And proclaiming “truth” also involves exposing error. One cannot proclaim the whole truth unless error is exposed and corrected. Truth is the best protector and preserver of souls against what Paul described as “plausible arguments.”

Much error is perpetrated and supported by spurious, yet “plausible” arguments. Most people who are in error will give you reasons for their positions that to them are quite reasonable. In other words, their beliefs seem to be true to them. And when you hear their arguments, they may appear to be quite plausible. But take to heart the proverb, “The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him” (Prov. 18:17). And Proverbs 16:25 is always true, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” And let us remember the warning of Scripture:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron (1 Tim 4:1f)

This entire church age is the “latter times” in which there is much error perpetrated and this needs to be corrected by the faithful minister of the Lord.

Let us briefly consider the last of the three qualities of a faithful minister in Colossians 2:1-5.

III. A true minister of the gospel longs for and rejoices when he sees in his people “discipline and stability in faith. (2:5)

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, ²that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. ⁵*For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.*

It would seem that Paul would affirm the Apostle John’s desire was his desire also. John wrote, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 4).

Some are satisfied by numbers as though that alone is some measure of God’s blessing. And they are willing to sacrifice strong and clear teaching in order to build or maintain the crowds. But that will not produce “discipline and stability.” I would hope that this church will never settle for any less than what Paul longed for in this church at Colossae.

"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace,
which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:32)
