

(Colossians) 06 True Knowledge-Christ Himself

by Bob Utley

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer and intercession for the spiritual well-being of believers, and the need for a deeper understanding of the gospel through a true knowledge of God.

Duration: 40:15

Scripture: Colossians 1:13

Topics: "Colossians"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the search for truth in various world religions and emphasizes the importance of recognizing the truth found in the gospel. He highlights the power of materialism and how it blinds people to the true wealth found in the gospel. The speaker then delves into the interpretation of a specific passage in the Bible, expressing the need for proper biblical interpretation and the dangers of ignorance in the church. Lastly, he commends the churches for their discipline and stability in the face of false teachings and encourages them to continue on this solid foundation.

Transcript

Slap your mama, that was good. Feel like the Lord has already been here and spoken, amen? I just count it a privilege to get to come every week, get to share with you out of a book that I love, and thank you all for praying for me. And I hope that you read the first few verses, the first paragraph, maybe, of chapter 2. You know what I'm doing, I'm working through this book.

So please don't tell me somebody said, well, you speak over my head. I can't, I'm 5'7", get over it. Now, if you know I'm in Colossians, if you want the Lord to speak to you, why don't you read Colossians, for you come.

And pray for me and for you. Preaching is a two-way street. It is not to be enjoyed.

It is not for you to vote on. It is the Word of God to change your life. Now, you can certainly disagree with me.

Holy moly, I disagreed with me after two weeks. Get over it, we're not talking about the personal interpretation. We're talking about the power of the redeemed, inspired, authoritative Word of God, amen? Now, the only way I think to properly interpret it is to try to do it in historical context, in literary context, and

remind ourselves the only inspired person is the original author.

Now, all of us are desperately trying to understand it so that we can apply it. Now, we're not going to apply it the same because there's no royal golden rule on how to apply these texts. So there's going to be some fudge room.

But brothers and sisters, we need to seek the Lord and what is your will for my life and what are these texts saying to me? And then give me the courage to walk in them. Now, Colossians, as you know, is Paul in prison writing to a group of churches that he never had visited personally. He did not start these churches.

A man named Epiphras, a lay person, started these churches. And these churches are now embroiled in controversy. They're now embroiled in false teachings.

We, of course, know that as Gnosticism or this whole thing that you would recognize from the Gospel of Thomas or the Da Vinci Code. Now, because of that, we have to realize that Paul is going to use some Gnostic concepts and loan words. And he is hearing what the false teachers are saying through Epiphras, and I'm sure from his own understanding of what's happening in the church from others.

And now he's going to redefine, represent these truths, not in light of what they have been defined as, but in light of what they are in truth. You know, the Gnostics, like so many false teachers, acclaim they are trying to make the Gospel relevant to their day and their society. May I say to you that we do not have to make the eternal Word of God relevant.

It is not my task to make God's Word relevant. It is my task to make God's Word known. It's the Spirit's task to make God's Word relevant.

Amen? I still like John Bisagno's statement so much. He said we have the line of the tribe of Judah. We don't need to defend the Bible.

We need to turn the line loose. Let's turn him loose. And friends, if Colossians doesn't turn the line loose, that line can't get loose because this is a book about Jesus Christ.

That is the center pillar of the controversy. Who is Jesus? It just doesn't get any clearer than chapter 1, 13 through 16. Now, we're working from that Christological statement now.

Back in chapter 1, verse 24, Paul began to share his ministry to the churches. Now, that really continues in chapter 2, 1 through 5, and that's what I'm going to do today is chapter 2, 1 through 5. As you know, the chapter and verse divisions are not inspired. They were done in the Middle Ages just to help us find a certain passage quicker.

And quite often, it messes up the context when we do that. But all of our Bibles are marked that way, so we're just going to have to live with it. Now, there are several concepts in chapter 2 that I want to work through with you.

And I hope as I do this, you realize what I'm trying to do. I'm not just trying to interpret a passage for you. I'm trying to be a role model of how to interpret.

Because there's such terrible Bible interpretation in the church. There's such ignorance in the pew. Self-willed.

Because what we want is a ticket to heaven and not daily death-to-self Christ-likeness. So we're content with a few denominational proof texts and try to ignore the rest of Scripture. But I want to tell you, the Bible is a radical message to fallen man that demands our attention, our sacrifice, and our diligence.

And what we want to do is just come and have a great time listening to Schuyler and the choir sing. And I do have a great time with that. But I guarantee you, if we live this place, nothing's different in us because we've been here a plague on what our gathering.

It's not about when we're together. It's when we're out there, it's the real issue. Is Jesus real out there or we just get goose bumps in here? We're keeping the line of the tribe of Judah in a cage if all we do is get together once a week in a nice, comfortable building.

It's just, friends, we've just missed it. Thank you, Les, for praying about the aha moment. It must occur.

And when it occurs, it's all about the gospel and about him, not about us. But I guarantee you, American Christianity is all about me. And if you don't believe that, just get your feelings hurt when somebody doesn't call, doesn't come, and doesn't pat you on the back for how wonderful you are.

And none of us are wonderful. None of us. Well, I think I'm ready now to get in this text.

My wife told me, said, you ought to read it first. I know that. I'm not going to do it, but I know it.

So I guess, just so you'll know my mind, I don't read it so it's going to force you to keep your Bibles open and bring them. Amen? That's my one fear about a pew Bible. If all we do is open a pew Bible for a few verses and put it back in the pew and don't look at it till next week, we ought to burn the pew Bibles.

Because that book needs to be a part of your life every day, not just read a few sentences and then put it back between the hymnals. Now, Paul, well, this first verse really grabbed me in one sense. Here is Paul.

I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf for those who are in Laodicea. Now, you just got to kind of unpack this. He's writing to the city of Colossae, but he's talking about those in Laodicea.

Well, remember the introduction. This is the Lycus River Valley. There are three churches here started by Epiphra.

Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea. This book obviously was to be read in all those churches. So Paul says to the church, he did not write it directly.

He says, I want you to know what a great struggle, and this word struggle is either a military term or an athletic term. Now, we wonder, what is he talking about? Is he talking about his intercessory prayer ministry for the churches? Now, just think about this for a minute. Here is a man called on the road to Damascus to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

There's three little bitty churches that he's never been to before that he's heard about from a second hand who have never seen his face, and Paul, the implication is, I pray for you often. May I ask you a question? Do you pray for any, any Christian activity outside your own comfortable sphere? Is there any people group in the world that you're praying for? Is there any other church you pray for? Is there any other preacher you pray for? Is there any other ministry you pray for? Do you agonize before God for the work of Christ around the world? Or do you just pray for the air conditioner here to keep working? Here is Paul saying, I want to tell you how great the struggle is for you. And he never even met him personally.

I think we ought to pick a people group. Maybe you ought to pray for another denomination. Maybe you ought to pray for another church.

Maybe you ought to pray for another ministry. We've got to get somehow, I'm speaking practically now. In mature Christianity, the evidence that we're out from under the killing influence of the fall is that we begin to think about others because the fall is about me.

And redemption is freeing us from the tyranny of self. Do we ever pray for the churches down the road? Do we ever thank God for revivals that occur at the denominations? Do we ever pray for missionaries? I'm scared to death. The mission emphasis in Baptist churches will die with the death of the last WMU and RA programs.

Not only do we not pray for missions, our churches are not filled with people surrendering to missions. And we're losing the emphasis on missions. Sure, we give \$5 on the plate twice a year.

Get off my back, God. God doesn't want your \$5. He wants your life.

And he wants agonizing intercessory prayer for kingdom stuff versus your personal washing machine, carburetor. We're praying for everything about us and wondering why there's no power in our lives. Here is the Apostle Paul in prison praying for three churches, agonizing over the false teachers in three churches he never personally met.

Thank you, Paul. Thank you, Paul. And he continues, for all those who have not personally seen my face, these were not fans, do you ever think about the kingdom of God as isolated pockets of the new age in a fallen realm? Do you ever think about the church as a community of eternity inside a community of death and hell? These little churches were so small, so feeble, no money, no powerful people, strewn with heresy, and yet Paul saw them as the only hope of the gospel.

Oh, I thank God for the church, weak though she may be, sinful though she may be, misguided though she may be. These are pockets of the kingdom in a fallen world of self and sin. God, thank you for the church and thank you for those who pray.

There's some praying right now for this service. I wonder where the real ministry is, praying for this service or sitting in this service. Okay, verse 2 with me.

That their hearts may be encouraged. That their hearts may be encouraged. We're starting, there are several purpose clauses in here.

I know many of you are educated. These are Hena clauses, which give you the purpose of what Paul's about to say. So he's going to start one of these purpose clauses.

That their hearts may be encouraged. The word encouraged, interestingly enough, is the same word as paraclete, which is the name for the Holy Spirit in John 14, 15, and 16, and the name of Jesus himself in 1 John 2. It's a legal metaphor for one called alongside to help from the Roman legal system. Paul is praying these churches strewn with problems and false teachers, little and struggling, isolated from the big cities, isolated from Christian leadership, that they may be encouraged.

And how is he going to encourage them? Having been knit together in love. Now, it's interesting to me that this word knit together is used several times by Paul. It's an interesting word.

If you look in your Bibles with me very quickly, just take a moment to do this. If you'll notice in chapter 2, verse 19, 2, verse 19, the same word knit together. I don't know how this works.

This is a metaphor beyond my comprehension. It's something about the connectedness of the human body. Now, I'm not a medical doctor.

I'm the kind of doctor that can't help you. But something about the ligaments and joints and muscles and veins that hold the human body together. Paul takes that unity, that integratedness, that must-come-togetherness, and uses it for Christian maturity.

The knitted together. And how often in Paul... I was just thinking, I was trying to get out of my memory and couldn't do it. In love.

I remember that Ephesians 1, that he called us to be holy and blameless before him in love. How often Paul mentions that in love? Because there ain't going to be any knitting unless there's love. Love from God.

And then he says, follow with me, having been knit together in love and attaining to... You like the word all? All the wealth. Now, this word wealth is really the word riches. All the riches that comes from the full assurance of understanding.

Oh, man. Do you know what real wealth is? Guess how much you're taking to heaven with you. It always tickles me that Western people say, oh, I've done this for my children.

Yeah, and they're so spoiled, they're going to waste it all. They didn't want your resources, they wanted you. But no, we're going to give them stuff.

And they're not going to know how to handle it. The real wealth, particularly in a Christian home, is the knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ. I've met some really poor people that are the wealthiest that I've ever met.

I think I've told you this, but it just sticks in my experience. I was in Madras, India on an evangelistic crusade buying tracts from an Indian because there's so many dialects, and I was buying Telugu tracts. And I went in this little home, little Indian home.

It wasn't a poverty home, but it was a humble home. And this Indian pastor asked this lady to pray after we bought this material. This little lady just dropped on her knees right there in front of us and began to pray.

And I thought, hmm, I've got more education, I've got more money, I've got more life insurance. I got a car. How much more do I have of physical things than this little Indian lady? But I want to tell you, me hearing that lady pray, I knew who was the wealthy in that room, and it wasn't Bob.

Wasn't Bob at all. We have been blinded to the power of materialism. Even those of us in the church have heard the gospel so much it's become secondhand to us, and it is the answer to the problems of the world, and we take it for granted.

We're not floating on a sea of relativity in an age of post-modernity. We have the truth of the gospel. And that's the most valuable thing we can ever have.

There's nothing beyond that. Reality is ours if we will grasp it and walk in it. All the wealth.

Have you ever stopped just for a moment to say, thank you, God, for revelation? Thank you, God, for a Bible. Thank you, God, for an incarnate son. Thank you, God, for a plan of salvation.

Thank you, God, I have something to say in the face of a culture that knows nothing but me and mine. A peace that passes all understanding because of a revealed, not a sought-out, not a humanly discovered, but a revealed, inspired body of truth that we call the gospel. What a wealthy place we are.

Wealthy place. And, of course, this full understanding. You know, we're talking to Gnostics who claim to have so much special knowledge.

Oh, we've got the real... I used to get so tickled at the heretic, Garner Ted Armstrong, the worldwide church of God saying, now the real Greek text has, what do I got, chopped liver? The real Greek text. I could just throw up. We don't need deeper knowledge.

We don't need a PhD. We don't need 170 IQ. We need the simple truth of the revealed gospel for hope, health, wealth, and eternal life.

Full understanding. Now, just to unpack this a bit, this full assurance is kind of a compound word of this little key word I've been telling you, pleroma, which is the Greek word to fulfill or fill or complete. And it was used by the Gnostics for their angelic levels between a good God and a lesser God.

And you can't be saved without secret knowledge, passwords between these angelic spheres. And Paul cuts to the heart of the issue. It's not the secret knowledge you have or don't have.

It's not that someone gives you the truth. Sounds like Scientology, doesn't it? It's the person of Jesus Christ. Knowledge is not creedal.

It's personal. I don't need to know the truth creedal. I need to know the truth who is the way, the truth, and the life.

It's not that I have correct theology. It's that I know Him who is correct theology. Do you think when you get to heaven that God's going to agree with your theology? Do you think you have correct theology? You arrogant twaddle you.

So you got it right and everybody else has had it wrong that struggled in the history of the church, but your traditions, your theology, your experiences, your denominational backgrounds, those are the truth, huh? Holy spit that's arrogant. All of us are struggling and what we cling to is not the details of our theological systems, but the feet of Him who died in our place. Look at the next little phrase.

Resulting in a true knowledge of God. Man, the word true says it all, doesn't it? I have said to you over and over, I don't know how to say it anymore. The real issue about Christianity is, is it true? And the real question about is it true is, where is authoritative information found? Now this is bottom lines you can get.

Is authoritative information in my personal experience? Is authoritative information in my family tradition? Is authoritative information in my culture? Is authoritative information found in the world religions or is authoritative information found in Scripture? Now I would like to ask this again. If I gave you a three-by-five card and ask you, will you write down for me why you think the Bible is true? What would you put on that card? Would you put anything on that card? You know, I've been watching recently this history channel on some of the world religions. These are sincere, highly motivated, many of them very moral people who

claim and search for truth.

And yet we sit in all of our comfort and traditions and we have the truth and it's become secondhand to us because for most of us it didn't cost us anything. The real issue is what is truth? Do you believe you have true knowledge? And I want to tell you, the more you know, the more that doubts enter into this area. The more you recognize how presuppositional all human knowledge is including science and even mathematics.

Axioms are nothing more than non-demonstratable formulas. Those are called presuppositions. True knowledge.

And then he mentions this very famous word, true knowledge of God's mystery. Now I want to tell you, the older I get in life, the more I use the English word mystery. I just must admit to you, the more you know, the more you know you don't know.

It's the second-year seminary student that scared me to death. They know everything. Now this word is used in wonderful ways by Paul.

But you know, I sometimes want to grab Paul and shake him. He uses this word at least in 11 different ways. And you're going, Paul, can't you pick another word? Obviously not.

The mystery, if I could kind of capsule it, well, let me just read of it. I'm going to read a little bit out of 2 Corinthians 2, 1 through 8. And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in pervasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power. That your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

Yet we do not speak wisdom among those who are mature of wisdom. However, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away. But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory.

The wisdom which none of the rulers of this age have understood, for if second-class conditional, they had understood it, which they did not, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory, which they did. The mystery is Christ among you, the hope of glory. The mystery is the dividing wall between Gentile and Jews is down.

Ephesians 2. The mystery is there is no more Jew or Greek or male or female or slave or free or educated or uneducated, pig mutt or not pig mutt. We're all one in Jesus Christ. The mystery is God's eternal redemptive plan has unified the human race, unified us in salvation and redemption for all who will trust Christ as their only hope.

It is the hiddenness of the gospel now fully revealed. That's the mystery that Paul is talking about. What a marvelous revelation.

Now, if you look at your Bibles, there's a little kicker here, and my new American standard doesn't translate this very well. I'm in the end of verse 2. The mystery, God's mystery, that is Christ himself. Now,

do you see the word himself is in italics? But a matter of fact, that is in italics, which says that's not in the original text.

There's so many variants here in the Greek manuscript family that all of us wonder, what was the original? Well, it looks like that, I think it's Papyri 72, has two genitives right together. Of God, of Christ. Now, that is a strange, there's nothing like that anywhere else.

And usually you say, the stranger it is, the probably the more original it is. So whether this should be Christ himself or God in Christ or the God that sent Christ, you get the view. New American standard is saying the mystery is not even a plan.

It's a person. The gospel is a person. Salvation, the plan of salvation is a person.

Eternal life, heaven is a person. We've got to capture that. We've got to know that.

And in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Paul's coming back again. I'm so, I try to be as transparent as possible with you and not demand that you agree with me.

I hope you've learned that at least. I am so concerned when I look at the most popular books that Christians are buying, the code book. Enamored by the Da Vinci code.

What heaven is like because I've been there. My personal experience with an angel. How to get rich in Jesus' name.

It's like we're looking for something more, something deeper, something better, something more dynamic, something real, something true. Friends, if you have Jesus, there's nothing beyond that. Walk in him.

Hope I want to know more than my Presbyterian friend. I want to win at Bible trivia. I want my Sunday school class to go, Shaw, where'd you get that? It's back to that me, isn't it? I want to know more.

I want to be the one they look to. I want to be a rabbi. If you get the aha moment, we're all rabbis and it's all about him.

And all rabbis suck. PhD ones too. It's a theological word from Hezekiah.

Now many of your translations, I didn't check all of them, but verse three, mine says, in whom are hidden the treasures of wisdom and knowledge? Not in Gnosticism, not in secret, not in human experimentation, not in human knowledge, not in drug-induced visions. No, no, no, in whom? Now that's taking this as a masculine. It is quite possible in the Greek to take this as a neuter.

If it is a neuter, it's the mystery, the gospel. Now whether it's masculine or neuter, you just can't tell. But look at verse four.

That no one will delude you with a pervasive argument. Now here's the problem. There are false teachers then, there are false teachers today.

I have a real fear for the Church of Jesus Christ in America because of the collective ignorance of modern Christians to gospel, scriptural truth. We know our traditions, we know our liturgy, we know our systematic theology from Mama, but we don't know our Bible. And we're prone to be led.

And I want to tell you, these false teachers were not dummies. They didn't have a sign on their neck saying, false teacher. These are logical, sharp, persuasive, dynamic.

The only thing that protects your heart and mind from the false teachers then and now is a knowledge of the Word of God and a heart full of the Holy Spirit. I saw a statistic how many people saved in evangelical churches was sucked off into a cult group within five years. It was a horrible percentage because we want to get them baptized and then we tell them, you're on your own.

Be warm and fed. We dumped you, that's all we need. We've been one of the few denominations that emphasize evangelism and we've been one of the many denominations that have absolutely failed miserably in discipleship.

These are eloquent people. Now, are they self-deluded or are they satanically inspired? I think there are some false teachers who really don't know they're false teachers. And I think there are some false teachers who know exactly who they are and are doing it for personal reasons.

Now, I've said it to you before, I want to remind you again. If somebody says, give me your wife, give me your money, and God only speaks to me, run. Financial exploitation, sexual exploitation, and all revelation comes through me are the irreducible marks of false teachers.

Irreducible marks. Verse 5, even though this is a first-class conditional sentence, you can't tell it, but the if is there. Paul is saying, I have not with you.

I've never been with you. I'm not there in flesh. Think of how this starts back in verse 1. But I'm there in the spirit.

Now, this is very similar to that court scene. Remember the guy who was in Corinth and he was living with his own mother, stepmother or something, and they got a court going. Paul says, I wasn't there physically, but I was there in the spirit.

When you had that church court. I guess Paul is saying to them, you know, I've never been with you. I'm not there with you in the flesh now.

But churches, struggling churches, Christians, I want you to know that I, the apostle of the Gentiles, who pray for you and agonize for you regularly, I'm there with you. I wish to God as a pastor, I do have a pastor's heart. I worry about Christians who are so uninformed.

I hear people talk in Walmart and in the barbershop and they don't know who I am for nothing. And I hear such crazy beliefs, such mixtures of world religions and personal experiences and personal preferences and denominational, oh my soul, and you want to shake them and say, where did you get that? It's the responsibility of Christian leaders to protect their people from falsehood. But you cannot protect them when there's willful ignorance.

You cannot protect them when they will not read their Bibles for themselves. You cannot protect them when they will not pray. You cannot protect them when they will not participate in gathered worship or ministry.

You cannot protect them isolated in a materialistic religious amalgamated culture. How I would if I could. But only Scripture and the Spirit can protect your heart and mind in Jesus Christ.

Only the Scripture and the Spirit can gird up your mind to face a world like ours. The problem is we just don't think our world is that bad and it is corrupt to the core. Corrupt to the core.

And then Paul says to them, he applauds them, he thanks the Lord for them about two things that'll lead us in the next Sunday sermon. Good discipline and stability. The first one is a military term for organization and steadfastness of an army.

The second one is a construction metaphor for a solid and sure foundation. Now these churches are small, struggling. Their leader has gone to find Paul in prison which means their founder was not present.

False teachers were coming into each of these churches claiming special knowledge, secret knowledge, a different gospel, a different Jesus. And Paul can say, I pray for you and I thank that your good discipline and your stability. I thank you.

To God we had that. Well, Lord, I wonder how many former pastors still pray for the people here. I wonder how many former staff members still pray for the people here.

I wonder how many Sunday school teachers pray every week for everybody in their class. I wonder how many deacons pray for the church and our ministry. Paul can pray for church he had never seen and all we pray for is when we get sick or want something.

God, I pray you'd help us to be prayerful people, people who have the kingdom on our heart, people who have the world on our heart, people who have lost people on our heart, people who have vulnerable Christians on our heart, people who love one another, care for one another, pray for one another, walk with one another, lift up one another. Well, God, if you can do it in Colossae and Hierapolis, you can do it in Dallas. And I pray you'd do it.

I pray you'd bring forth those leaders who will pray. I pray you'd bring forth the knowledge that gives stability. I pray you would accentuate revelation that we would be proclaimers of the truth and not proclaimers of personal opinion.

I pray you'd protect us from the evil one without and the fallen nature from within and a world system that has clouded our mind. I pray you'd protect us from these things. And I pray that people will know that we've been with you because we love one another.

Lord, I know you love your church because you sent your son to die for it. I know you love the church because Paul prayed for all those of his day. And I pray we would be prayers, supporters, lovers, encouragers, exhorters of the church in our day.

In Jesus' name, amen. I never know how to give an invitation, really. I really don't.

I'm not a three-point preacher, as somebody once said. Is there going to be another come-to-Jesus sermon? I don't have anything but come-to-Jesus sermons. I don't have anything but this book to say.

I don't have any wonderful wisdom to tell you the truth except the verses and concepts of these inspired men and women. So I say to you, if God has spoken to your heart and if he hasn't, you can't do anything. But if he has, in whatever area he may have spoken to you, I invite you to respond.

We're not asking you to respond to a Baptist church. We're asking you to respond to the Spirit of God. We're not asking you necessarily to join us.

We're asking you to join him. If you want to join us, we'd love to have you here. We'd love to find a ministry for you.

We'd love to have another prayer and giver and goer. But before you leave this building, we hope you'll respond to him. A scholar prayed in your song service, you said that.

We sang those invitation hymns. Didn't you know what we were doing? We're setting the stage. We're not manipulating you because we can't manipulate you unless the Spirit of God speaks to you.

And if he speaks to you, we're not manipulating you. But we are calling on you to make a decisive decision to follow him. Follow him.

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