

THE ANALYSIS OF UNITY IN TRUTH

“¹ For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and *for* them at Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; ² That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; ³ In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. ⁵ For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. ⁶ As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk ye in him: ⁷ Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:1-7).

THE COMMUNITY IN UNITY

According to Colossians 2:1, the focus of the Lordship of Jesus centers around subjection to the truth of God’s revealed will through the His Word. That subjection should **not** centrally be motivated by a fear of chastisement, but by a love for Christ. The believer’s love for Christ should motivate him to withstand the world’s attacks, temptations and persecutions.

Paul writes to a CORPORATION of believers; A COMMUNITY OF FAITH united by common beliefs and purposes. Jesus’ Lordship over the corporate life of the church will only be seen as all of God’s children are drawn together into a unity that centers itself in God’s revealed truth; i.e. His Word. A unity in truth is a UNITY of CONVICTIONS and that unity is an UNBREAKABLE CHAIN.

Colossians 2:1; Paul wanted the Colossian Church to “know” that he agonized (conflicted) in prayer for their unity in truth. Gnosticism was dividing the church both theologically and practically. Within Gnostic practices, the person with a higher level of *spiritual enlightenment* (knowledge) was naturally given more status within the church. This individual was looked up to simply because some viewed him to be superior in intellect (knowledge of the depths of spiritual things). In most cases, this *knowledge* (Gnosis) was the result of the integration of pagan philosophies with Biblical truth.

According to Gnostic Scriptures and Fragments (Pistis Sophia: Book One), Jesus gave the Apostles immediate *knowledge* of the 24 *mysteries*. In Gnosticism, the message of the Apostles was not the gospel of Jesus Christ; leading people to faith in a Christ, regeneration and discipleship. Salvation was leading people to *Gnosis*; the knowledge of these 24 ranks of mysteries. Once a person achieved this knowledge, he became part of the *Pleroma* (the divine realm of the gods and the ultimate gnosis).

Paul’s agonizing in prayer was not a struggle with God, but about the constant danger of the deception of these believers at Colosse and at Laodicea. Paul wanted them to know of his prayer life and his spiritual struggle on their behalf that they might be encouraged to remain faithful and obedient to God’s Word. God’s encouragement is never just to make us feel good, but to motivate us to do that which we are encouraged to do. Therefore, Biblical encouragement (exhortation) is intended to persuade us to perform the truth we own and to do what we claim to believe.

THE BOND OF UNITY IN TRUTH (Colossians 2:2)

There are two aspects of this unity in truth.

1. **“Being knit together in love;” “A Threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12).** This three fold cord of unity is love for one another, (B) doctrinal foundations and (C) submission to God’s will. One of the principal means God uses to produce strength in a church is a bond of love for one another. This refers to a partnership in ministry built upon the foundation of loving one another, rather than *feeding* on each other by focusing on one another’s weaknesses and failures. How can a church effectively love the lost if it cannot even love one another?

2. The wealth (the knowledge) “of full assurance of understanding;” an accurate knowledge of God’s Word results in sure convictions (doctrinal foundations). This understanding will result in the FIRM CONFIDENCE that Jesus is Sovereign Lord. The word “acknowledgement” in Colossians 2:2 is from the Greek word *epignosis* (ep-ig’-no-sis). It was a word used to describe full, perfect, experiential knowledge (as opposed to mere intellectual knowledge). The important thing to note here is that this complete knowledge (*epignosis*) came through the understanding of the Word of God, not through a host of intermediary luminaries. Peter speaks to this same issue in his epistle warning about the deception of Gnosticism.

“¹ Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: ² Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge {*epignosis*} of God, and of Jesus our Lord, ³ According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge {*epignosis*} of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: ⁴ Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (II Peter 1:1-4).

“¹⁶ For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. ¹⁸ And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. ¹⁹ We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: ²⁰ Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. ²¹ For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost” (II Peter 1:16-21).

The more completely a person understands God’s Word, the firmer will be his resolve to see souls saved and to see lives changed by giving them an understanding of Who God is and His expectations of His children. We do not gain knowledge of God only to possess knowledge. Real knowledge is converted to faith and real faith enables us to move forward in our service to God and our “work of the ministry.” This generates spiritual confidence; not in ourselves or in our intellects, but in Christ Who is revealed to us in His Word. This kind of confidence produces a stable foundation of knowledge and conviction that the earthquakes of cultural revolutions will never be able to move.

Colossians 2:2-3; TWO FOUNDATIONS FOR UNITY IN TRUTH

1. SETTLED CONVICTIONS based upon a complete understanding of the “mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ (v 2).

The “mystery” referred to in this verse is the INCARNATION and the purpose of it, God’s complete propitiation and man’s complete reconciliation and redemption (the gospel message). The great truth of the incarnation is not that believers have found TRUTH, but that TRUTH has found them.

The “mystery” of the incarnation to the Gnostic mindset was unfathomable. This “mystery” involves the theanthropic Christ. This term describes the uniqueness of Jesus as God in human flesh; singular in Being with two distinct natures. The unity of a transcendent God with material beings was completely contradictory to Gnostic beliefs.

The word “mysteries” is translated from the Greek word *musterion* (moos-tay’-ree-on). This word can have two meanings depending on your spiritual perspective. To the Gnostic it meant religious secrets, confided only to the initiated at whatever level of illumination they had achieved. From a Biblical perspective, “mysteries” means the secret counsels which govern God in dealing with the righteous, which are hidden from ungodly and wicked men but are plain to the godly.

2. Jesus is the source of all truth and wisdom (v 3). There are no other intermediaries between God and men besides Jesus (I Timothy 2:5).

In Proverbs chapter eight, God speaks of His wisdom. He personalizes wisdom and equates it to Himself. He states that the person that finds wisdom, finds life (Proverbs 8:35). Is God talking about knowledge? Yes and No! Yes, if that knowledge is knowledge of God and His ways. No, if knowledge means attaining to and becoming the knowledge that God is. This latter is what Gnosticism believed.

The idea in Colossians 2:3 is that Christ is the PERSONIFICATION of wisdom. The idea is that ALL wisdom is found in Jesus. There is no need to seek another source because He lacks nothing that needs to be known. To know Who Christ is and what He has accomplished as the new Federal Head of the New Creation is to know and understand God's salvation. Faith simply receives that salvation as a gift from God. "In him (Christ Jesus) are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." "In Christ" all those treasures are fully and completely revealed to "whosoever will."

Colossians 2:4-5 - THE PROTECTION OF UNITY IN TRUTH; false teachers are like wolves that steal and devour sheep.

“²⁷ For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. ²⁸ Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. ²⁹ For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:27-31).

The warning of Colossians 2:4 is about false teachers who offer something Jesus doesn't offer, or who ask you to do something Jesus doesn't ask you to do. The word “beguile” is from the Greek word *paralogizomai* (par-al-og-id'-zom-ah-ee). It means to cheat by false reckoning or deceive by false reasoning. The latter is the meaning in Colossians 2:4. “Enticing words” is the meaning of this deception. Spacious and seemingly intellectual discourses can be very persuasive. Be careful of human reasoning (any reasoning without Scriptural foundations).

People are often led astray by calculated, logical, and *reasoned* religious beliefs. If these *religious beliefs* are not Bible-based, they are without any foundation. Persuasive speech and logical discourse has bound many people inside the *gates of Hell*.

In Colossians 2:5, Paul uses a military metaphor to describe *unity in truth*. The word “order” is from the Greek word *taxis* (tax'-is). Normally this was a military term denoting an orderly formation of soldiers. The structure (organization) of a local church is critical to protecting it against the infiltration of heresy. That is why God puts proven, spiritually mature leaders in leadership of local churches (Pastors and deacons). These individuals are God's *front line* of offense against spiritual corruption.

The unity in truth that the Colossian church had was a strong front (*based upon an exclusive loyalty to Christ*) against attacks. When the arguments and attacks of deception came against the individual believers at Colosse, they took up battle stations to confront the error.

Unity in truth is a defense. We do not retreat under opposition, but stand our ground and fight regardless of the consequences (expect casualties). Evangelism is our offense. We must not only stand our ground, we must move forward to take more. This must be a collective and combined effort.

The isolated Christian (existing outside of a doctrinally sound local church) is in constant danger of the gradual corrosive effects of a non-Christian culture. The degree of an individual's isolation from a Biblically grounded body of believers will determine the degree of influence of the world has upon on them. A *Lone Ranger* Christian is in constant danger of attack. The Lordship of Jesus Christ leads us into a close and deep relationship with God's community of faith.

Colossians 2:6-7; the Conformity of Unity in Truth

“Received” in Colossians 2:6 is from the Greek word *paralambano* (par-al-am-ban’-o). It means to accept or acknowledge a person to be what he professes to be. In doing so, that person receiving associates with the person being received. This refers to the instruction of the Scriptures regarding the Person of Jesus Christ that these believers had received from Paul.

There are two basic pseudo-Scriptural approaches to the Lordship of Jesus.

1. Without careful analysis, the Biblical demands of Jesus Christ become whatever a generation can determine Jesus to have been. Man creates God in his image. To one generation He is a revolutionary. To another generation He is a magician and exorcist. To our generation, He has been a great social reformer. In other words, each generation attempts to make Jesus what they are historically, rather than becoming what He is historically.
2. The second approach to the Lordship of Jesus is the central focus of *experience* related *truths*. In this case *rightness*, or correctness, is not determined by Scripture, but by experience. In other words, *This has happened to me, therefore this must be what Scripture means*. This is the determination of *truth* by experience, rather than the evaluation of experience by truth. Experiences are often the greatest deceivers. Almost every cult that exists is the by-product of a pseudo-religious experience (Mary Baker Eddy, Joseph Smith, etc.).

The Consistency of Unity in Truth; Colossians 2:6

There are two aspects of a Biblical “walk . . . in” Christ (compare I Corinthians 15:58).

1. “Steadfastness;” the Christian walk is not a series of sprints, but steady forward progress.
2. “Unmovable;” loyalty to Christ means that nothing, or no one, should hold a higher place in our life than our loyalty to Jesus Christ.

The Building Blocks of Consistency

The word “rooted” (2:7) is from the Greek word *rhizoo* (hrid-zo’-o). It means to be once for all settled in a fixed spot, unmovable, fixed on truth, firmly anchored in truth. “Built up in Him,” (not on, but “in”) refers to all that Jesus Christ is. This is the environment of our growth. His personality, His life and His power should be our daily possession.

“Established in faith;” the more you *try* your faith, the more you proved God’s ability to meet any and every need. The more that is done, the more established and stable our faith in God’s ability becomes. “Abounding in thanksgiving;” stable faith in God’s ability coincides with an abundance of thanksgiving. The transition is from questioning God’s willingness to provide and supply too thanksgiving for His willingness to do so.

The centrality of Biblical truth is the heart of unity. Christian unity is always unity in truth. Without truth, unity transcends to chaos and the disorder of instability. Without the stabilization of the absoluteness of God’s Word, man will be little more than a piece of clay molded by the whims and fancies of the cultural and intellectual climate of a *bandwagon* Christianity.

Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians
Chapter Seven
THE ANALYSIS OF UNITY IN TRUTH

1. What does the Lordship of Jesus focus the believer's attention on? _____

2. What should be our central motivation for subjection to the Lordship of Jesus? _____
3. What made the local church at Colosse a *community in unity*? _____

4. According to Colossians 2:1, what did Paul want these believers to know he was doing on their behalf and why did he want them to know this? _____

5. In Colossians 2:2, Paul says these believers were "being knit together in love." What are the three elements of the threefold cord of unity?
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____
6. What two things does a "full assurance of understanding" give to the believer?
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
7. How does false teaching destroy unity? _____

8. In Colossians 2:5 what is the military term Paul uses to describe unity in truth and what is the purpose in using this word? _____

9. Did God intend that any Christian ever exist in this world as a *lone wolf* without being accountable to a local assembly of believers? _____
10. List two false (pseudo) approaches to the Lordship of Jesus.
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
11. List two aspects of our "walk" (Col. 2:6) from I Corinthians 15:58 necessary for consistency in unity in truth.
 - A. _____
 - B. _____