

Colossians 1 v 24 - 2 v 5

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Date: 03 August 2014

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[0 : 00] and verse 5. So that's chapter 1 of Colossians reading through into chapter 2 and verse 5. If you've got the blue church Bible and you're not sure where Colossians is, then it's on page 1183. Page 1183. So let's hear God's Word. This is a letter that Paul wrote to some Christians, Christians like us, but it wasn't purely Paul's words. He was inspired, directed, guided, led to write these things by God the Holy Spirit. So this is God's Word to his people then and to us his people today. Verse 24. Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, which is the church.

I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the Word of God in its fullness, the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy which so powerfully works in me. I want you to know how much I'm struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments, for though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit, and delight to see how orderly you are, and how firm your faith in Christ is. We thank God that he still speaks to us in his Word. Amen. Well, as I say, if you'd like to turn to Colossians and chapters 1 and 2, the very end of chapter 1, we're looking at the last two verses there, and into the first part of chapter 2. Many of you will know that this week, Andrew, myself, and Mel and John moved into our new home in Abbots Road, and that was the conclusion of a couple of weeks of lots of decorating and painting and building and all sorts of things going on as well, and we had lots of help for that, which we're very grateful. And when we got in on the Monday, there was a great and just a sense of, well, at last. And I'm sure you appreciate and understand something of that.

When you've been involved in a task which has been demanding, whatever it may be, physically or mentally, or even emotionally demanding, when you get to the end of it, when you accomplish it, there's a real sense of satisfaction, isn't there? There's a real sense of accomplishment.

Not only because, at last, the task is over and the hard work's finished, and there's still quite a bit that we need to do on the house, but also there's that recognition that all that hard work's been worth it. All that labor's been worth it. It's been hard, it's been difficult, been grubby, or whatever, but it's been worth it. And the reality is this, that those things that come easily to us, we value less than those things that come to us at a cost. That's true, isn't it? When something comes easy, when something just sort of falls into our lap, we may be grateful for it, but we don't really appreciate it as much as something we've really had to graft for, work for, and struggle for, that something becomes all the more precious, all the more dear, because it has cost us something.

Now, if that's true in the practical life, the material matters of our lives, so it is the case as well in our Christian life of faith. The Apostle Paul here makes mention twice of the fact that he is somebody who struggles. There at the end of chapter 1, he says, verse 29, to this end I labor.

[4 : 39] That's hard labor. It's not just a sense of, I'm working, you know, I'm laboring hard, like at the rock face, the coal face, struggling, struggling. And again, he says, as he goes into the beginning of chapter 2, verse 1, I want you to know how much I'm struggling for you. And Paul is confessing this, not because he's trying to draw attention to himself, not because he's wanting the Colossians to be sympathetic towards him and say, poor old Paul, he's got such a hard life, and we

really feel sorry for him. Or even, rather, that they might be so grateful. Oh, Paul, he's so great, he's such a hard worker, we really want to lift him up and put him on a pedestal. Paul isn't doing that, he never, ever does that. Rather, he shares with them and confesses them what he's going through because he wants to encourage them. This is the great thing about the Bible, isn't it? All the way through, we have real people dealing with real problems in real situations, and we can associate with them. They aren't people who are the superheroes, who bullets bounce off.

They're people who are bruised and battered. They're people who struggle and suffer. And one of the reasons that Paul, I believe, is saying this is because as we're about to go into chapter 2, we find that he makes mention of several false teachers, people who pretended to be Christian teachers, but were teaching false religions, false ways of walking with Christ, false views of the person of Jesus Christ. And they are influencing the Christians in the region. And Laodicea was a nearby town with a church there, Colossus, and so on, in that western part of what we now know as Turkey.

Now, we'll come to some of those false teachings as we go through, but one of the things that seems to come out through their teaching is that some of their teaching was this, living the Christian life is pretty easy. And if living the Christian life isn't easy for you, then you're a problem person. You aren't really a person of faith. You aren't really a person who's spiritual. You aren't really a person who is up there in the echelons of Christian life. Christianity shouldn't be a struggle, and it shouldn't include suffering. And for that reason, Paul has been quite honest and open and spoken about his sufferings there in chapter 1, verse 24, I rejoice in what was suffered for you, fill up in my flesh, still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, and why he also speaks here about his struggles. See, progress in the Christian life must demand and inevitably will include a struggle. It's not easy. It's not a bed of roses. It's not just lying back and letting God. To live the Christian life and to progress in the Christian life is hard, tiring labor. And if you've been a Christian any length of time, then you know that is true. You know that it does not simply fall off the tree. And yet, Paul's desire and longing is, for these Christians, is that they should grow to maturity. He says that in verse 2. He says, we proclaim him admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone perfect. That's his goal. Now, that's his desire. That's his longing.

That's the longing of every apostle, every pastor, every preacher, every teacher, all those who have some spiritual oversight and care for God's people. It's to present God's people as perfect. What does he mean by perfect? Because if he means the sort of word that we mean by perfect, then every single Christian, pastor, teacher, preacher has failed utterly, haven't they? Because there's no perfect church. There's no perfect Christian. There's no perfect people. Well, that's not the sense of what he means. He's not talking about that goal, which ultimately is the goal when we get to heaven, to glory, when we shall be perfect, when we shall be without sin, because we shall have a sinless resurrection body, a glorious body like Christ. No, what he means here is he's talking about elsewhere what he calls maturity, completeness in that sense, a mature Christian, a mature Christian faith. It's something that we are all as believers to seek after, to strive for. It's one of the goals of the Christian life. Here's Paul as he writes the Ephesians saying something very similar. [9 : 18] I'll read there from verse 11. Speaking of Christ, it was Christ who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Maturity, Christian maturity is the goal that we are all striving for and that we are all aiming at and working towards, but we shall never attain fully in this physical body. But the reality is this, that none of us have reached it. So none of us are mature in the sense of what Paul is talking about. Okay, some of us are a bit maturer than others, if you know what I mean, and in lots of ways, mature in years. But this Christian maturity is something that we haven't reached yet. No matter how long you've been a Christian, no matter how your Bible knowledge is, no matter what your experiences you've had of God, you and I are still pressing on to maturity.

That's why we sing, as we did at the very beginning, some of the words of Paul, don't we, from Galatians 4, where he speaks about the fact, I have not yet attained, but I press on. I might know Christ and know him more. Now, Paul says to us here in Ephesians that the reason that he has given to the church apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers is for this very purpose. God has gifted his church with those servants of his that through their ministry, through

their labors, through their work, we as Christians may grow and mature. Now, when we think of those people, we think of the apostles and the prophets, particularly they are those who, under the Holy Spirit's inspiration, have given us the New Testament, what we have here in the Word of God. Those evangelists and pastors and teachers are those who, with the Spirit's wisdom and enabling, instruct us and open up to us

God's Word, that we might be helped by it, that we might grow and be matured. So they work together in that way. But here Paul speaks about the fact that this work is a work that no man can do in his own strength. He says this, to this end, what end? To the end of perfection, of seeing every Christian mature to this end. He says, I'm laboring hard, laboring, struggling. But he's not doing it in his own strength. And no pastor or teacher or evangelist or Christian minister in that way needs to and or must or should look to themselves for the strength and power to do it. It is Christ's work in and through them. And in that sense as well, it's important that we don't elevate Christian ministers above their station, if I'm going to that way. Because it is not them that does the work. If God has blessed the preaching, if God has encouraged us through the ministry of his Word, then let God be given the glory. Let God be given the praise. As Paul says here, it's God's work through him. Paul again says something similar when he writes in 1 Corinthians to the believers there. He says, by the grace of God,

I am what I am. And his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them. Paul's not boasting, for he says this, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Paul's strength and power to minister and to serve was Christ's strength and power working in him. And that's not just true of those who God has set apart to minister in that particular way, but for every Christian too.

We thought about that, I think, just the other week. That it is the power of Christ, only in his power, only in his strength, only in his supply, only in his enabling, can we live for God. And of course, the trouble is that when we look to our own resources, we get discouraged. When we look to ourselves, we get disheartened. And when we try in our own strength, we fail. So to you, dear friends, who are beginning this week of mission again, it is not in your strength you go. It is not in your power.

[13 : 52] It's not you who will be successful. If God works to bless, to save, to change, give him the glory. Rest in his strength. You may feel, and I hope you do feel, utterly weak and daunted by the task.

You should do. But Christ's power will work in you. Yes, you will labor. Yes, you will sweat. Yes, you will weep. But it will be Christ's powerful work in you. So this work, this hard work, which God enables his servants to do, that Paul was doing, that ministers of the gospel are to do, that Christians in service are to do. What is it? What is it that is this work? What is it that produces this maturity? What is the minister to be working at? What is the preacher to be working at? What is the tool, as it were, that God has given to his church that produces maturity in his people? Well, here it is. Paul tells us, doesn't it? Verse 28, we proclaim him. We proclaim him.

Well, we know who him is, don't we? Christ. It's as simple as that. In one sense, that's the summing up of everything that a pastor does or a preacher does. That's the summing up of everything that a minister does. If there's one thing that men in Bible college need to learn, it's three words. We proclaim him.

It's preaching Christ. It's not through fine-sounding arguments. It's not through cleverly engineered human learning that results can take place in the lives of men and women so that they come to Christ and go on in Christ. It is the setting forth of Christ Jesus before men and women.

Paul, when he wrote to the Corinthians in chapter 2, reminds them of this truth because they, like us today, were surrounded by people who thought they were wise without God. Here's what he says.

[15 : 53] When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. Now, Paul was probably one of the most intelligent men of his day and the most taught men of his day, most qualified men of his day. But, he says, for I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

I came to you in weakness and fear with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom but on God's power. The commission that we have as Christians, the commission of this local church and every local church is to proclaim Christ, to make him known, to declare him. Nothing more is needed because in Christ are all the fullness of the blessings of God. That's what Paul has been saying again and again. Verse 19, for God was

pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Christ. Verse 9 of chapter 2, for in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives bodily. We don't have to preach anything more than Christ, just him and all the blessings and the riches that are in him. But, dear friends, we must not preach anything less than Christ because without Christ there is nothing effectual that can be done.

Men and women cannot be saved without Christ. Lives cannot be changed from darkness to light unless we proclaim Christ. He is the only one who can save the dying world in which God has placed us.

We must preach Christ. And when we preach Christ, when we proclaim him as we should, then there are two evidences, two effects upon those who hear with faith. Not just upon those who come to faith in Christ, but those who are Christians. When Christ is proclaimed, then two things happen. And Paul speaks of them here in verse 28. We proclaim him. We might put a little word in there by admonishing and teaching. But that's the sense of the link, isn't it? We proclaim him. And as we proclaim Christ, something happens. First of all, there is admonition. Not a word we use very often, but we know something of what it means. It means to correct. It means to discipline. It means to bring something which is wrong and out of kilter back into its proper shape. To bring something back into God's will, which is outside of God's will. When we preach Christ, there's an admonishing effect.

Paul speaks about it a bit later when he writes to Titus. He says this, For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions. Now this admonishing work of the word of God is a painful process. We might even call it a negative process. Because what it does is, by the gospel, shines into our hearts and shows us those dark, dusty, cobwebby, ugly areas of our lives. Those things that we hide away from everybody else. It brings and exposes them for what they really are. That's the very reason that our Lord Jesus Christ came into this world. He didn't come into this world to pat us on the head and say, well done, weren't you a good boy? The Lord Jesus came to be light in this world to expose.

[19 : 25] Here's what he himself says in John chapter 3. Light has come into the world, but men love darkness instead of light because their deeds are evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. That's why it's important that when we preach Christ, we preach him as the saviour of sinners.

We preach repentance as well as faith. We preach God's judgment and holiness as well as his love and mercy. See, it's very tempting. And I think it's true to say that many Christians have given into that temptation to remove the admonition part of the Christian gospel, to take away the sting of correction, to take away the probe, as it were, of the sword of God's word, which pierces between bone and marrow, which pierces the heart and points out those things which are so very wrong. But you see, if we take away the admonition, if we proclaim Christ without the admonition, then ultimately we empty the gospel of its power. We take away the purpose for Christ's coming. We take away the reason for the cross. If it wasn't for our sin that Christ died, why did he die? If it wasn't so that he might bear our punishment to rescue us from hell, then why was it necessary for God's Son to come into this world? If we're good enough to get to God by our own merits and works, then why was it necessary at all for the gospel to be preached? No, you see, the power of the gospel is not just that the punishment was taken away when Christ died at the cross, but the power of sin as well.

Romans 6, Paul speaking about our unity and our union with Christ, and he says this, For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Our unity with Christ is such that not only were our sins laid upon him at the cross, so that what we deserved he bore in our place, but in one sense our very selves were taken to the cross, so that actually we died to the power of sin. We died to its influence upon us, so that we might be changed.

[21 : 59] Have you felt the piercing of God's Word into your heart and life? Don't shy away from it. Don't turn away from it. It's a bit like that time when your mother took you into the kitchen and put you on the chair because you'd fallen over and cut your knee, hadn't you? Because you'd been on your bike learning to ride and you'd fallen over in the gravel. And so she puts you there. What does she do?

She gets the TCP out and with a bit of cotton wool she rubs it. And what do you go? Ow! Because you jump up and down because it hurt. What's she doing? She's cleansing the wounds to make you. When God, by his Word and through the preaching of his Word and the reading of his Word

and the application of his Word, touches upon those painful parts of our lives, when it says to us, this isn't pleasing to God. This isn't what God's will is. That is sinful. It isn't so that we may simply just go on and recoil. It is so that we might be cleansed and that we might be able to grow and be healed and we might be healthy and whole. This is the surgeon's knife, as it were, God's Word, cutting away those diseased parts. So we proclaim Christ and in proclaiming Christ we proclaim him as the one who admonishes. Showing Christ the light of the world shows up our great sinfulness. But also Paul, on the second part, speaks about proclaiming him by teaching everyone with all wisdom. And we might think of that more in the sense of instruction and guidance. Again, in that passage I read from Titus and chapter 2, there again are these two aspects to the Gospel, to God's Word.

One is we might think of as negative, though ultimately it's positive. It's the cutting away, it's the pointing out the disease and the sinfulness and the wickedness. And then there is the other aspect of it, which is the positive. So where he says God's grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. In one sense it says yes to living godly. It's positive effects as well as those negative effects. The Gospel of Christ transforms us not simply by, if I can put it this way, pointing out the wrong, but actually by molding and shaping the good. In the Old Testament God often used the illustration of a potter at his wheel with clay and likened his people to a clay pot. Jeremiah is probably one of the best examples of that, and I'll just read to you briefly part of that for a moment. And it'll help us, I think, envisage what we're getting at. This is the word that came to Jeremiah. It's Jeremiah 18. [25 : 03] Go down to the potter's house, and there I'll give you my message. So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred. In other words, out of shape, misshapen in his hands. So the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. And God goes on to explain to the prophet Jeremiah that's exactly what God is doing with Israel, his people. They were misshapen. And so God was reshaping them, and he was doing it, and it was going to be a very painful process for them. And so it is with us too. There is a negative aspect of God taking that misshapen lump of clay, which we are when we are first converted, and as we continue to be to a certain degree, and reshaping us into his will. So the admonition of God's word in Christ corrects the misshapen areas of our lives, and the instruction of God's word reshapes us after the potter's will. So it's not just simply that God just takes that lump of clay and makes us into a nice shape, but he reshapes us into something which is according to his will and his purpose. That's why when we read the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, we find so much teaching and instruction about living the Christian life. We have so much that teaches us about how we are to live, and what our lives are to look like, because what is happening is that we are being remoulded. Again, Paul, this time writing to the Christians in Rome, reminds them of this truth, that they are being moulded whether they like it or not, either by the world in which they live or by God. Here's what he says,

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you'll be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will. See, whether we recognize it or not, the reality is that we are constantly being influenced in our thinking and pressurized into the lifestyle of the world around about us. When you turn on the telly, whenever you pick up a newspaper, whenever you're in conversation with your schoolmates or university friends, wherever it may be, there's an influence that's being pressed upon you to be something like them, to take on their view of life, to take on their worldview and their way of thinking, their lifestyle. You see, what we must recognize, and we have to recognize as Christians, is the world in which we live is not a neutral world. It is a world that the Bible makes very clear, which is under the mastery, the direction, and the influence of Satan. He is real. He is at work. His purpose is to destroy and to undermine the things of God. And those things around about us that influence and pressurize us away from Christ are doing so purposefully. So what do we do? If we continue to allow ourselves simply to be following the pattern and the pressures of the world in which we live, then we shall be out of shape for God's service and for his will. We won't become those people that God wants us to be. So to prevent that happening, to prevent us from being completely misshapen, we need God's Word. For God's Word is that which shapes and corrects and fashions us. As we read it, as we hear it, and by faith apply it to our lives, there is power to transform us. That's the Spirit's work, to transform us through the Word. So Paul is saying here, we proclaim Christ. In proclaiming Christ, what we are doing is dealing with the negative, but we're also enhancing the

positive.

And when we read God's Word, that's what we're looking for. Lord, show me those things through your Word that I haven't dealt with, that you want to deal with and change. And Lord, let me be, as it were, malleable in your hands to be shaped by your Word, to be that person that you want me to be. That's why it's important for us to read, important for us to come under God's preaching and teaching. It's important for us to be men and women of the book. Now, how do we know if that's happening? How do we know if that's happening? We say, well, you know, that's great, that's good, but how do we know if we're receiving this teaching that we should be? How do we know if we're getting the preaching of Christ, which is meant to have that effect? What's the evidence that God's Word is at work in our lives? Can we look to anything and see anything in our church or in our own lives that shows that God is doing just that? Well, here we see that Paul, I believe, brings out several things which show the purpose of his ministry and the fruit of it as well. We go on then into chapter 2. Paul speaks about his struggles for the churches, for those people he's not met, but how his teaching ministry is for that purpose. He says, my purpose is, and then we have several things. First of all, the purpose and the fruit, the thing that shows that

God's Word is at work in our lives is this, that they may be encouraged in hearts. To be encouraged means literally to be built up. It means to be strengthened, to be strengthened particularly in our faith. And so if the preaching that we hear tears us down rather than building us up in our faith, then clearly it's not Christ that's being proclaimed. If Christ is proclaimed, then our hearts and our faith is strengthened in him. We are built up in our trust in him. Proclaiming Christ will always cause us to grow and to be built up. Here's Paul again, Ephesians 4, a bit later on after he's been speaking about the ministry that God has given through his servants. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head that is Christ. From him, the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

[31 : 27] Let me ask you, when Christ is proclaimed, when Christ is spoken of, is there a building up of your faith? I hope there is. There should be in the preaching of Christ. Secondly, we see here that there is a unity in love. Unity in love, that they may be united in love. That means love for one another. He's not talking here about love for Christ. That's true, that's vital, but he's talking rather of love for one another. Preaching Christ unites believers. Preaching falsehood divides believers. People often say, why are there so many denominations in the world? Why is the Christian church so scattered? The sad truth is that more often than not, the reason for that is that men have taught things contrary to the Bible and gone off on their own direction and gone off in their own way. Now, let me say this straightforwardly. We are not the perfect church who have got everything right, okay? Please don't think I'm saying that. Please don't think that I'm saying that everything that we teach in this church or that the pastor preachers or the elders believe is absolutely perfectly, the quintessential truth. But the reality is that our desire as a church is to be those who hold to and live out God's word faithfully. We're sinful.

We get it wrong. We're going to get it wrong. But true teaching of Christ, preaching Christ will unite us. Unite us over the barriers of age, the barriers of race, of the barriers of all sorts of things, class and so on. But false teaching divides us. So does the word of Christ, as we preach Christ, does it draw out love from our hearts? As Christ is lifted up, do we have a greater love for one another, compassion for one another, concern for one another? Are we moved to acts of kindness towards one another? That should be the case in the preaching of God's word. This is all part of the maturing process. We see here as well that when Christ is preached and proclaimed, Paul's purpose was so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ. Simply put, that they might have a complete understanding. Paul's emphasis is not so much on having an intellectual grasp of everything. Now it's important, I believe, that we study, as we are on Wednesdays, doctrine. In other words, teaching from the Bible. It's important that we do.

I'm sorry, but dear friends, all of us, no matter how we may be gifted intellectually, should have a desire that we might know more of God and more of his word. It should be that we want to go deeper into the things of God's word, not be settled and happy just to know the fringes. None of us would be like that in any other sphere, except we need Christ and more of him. But Paul's emphasis is not simply about stuffing our brains with doctrine and truth. Rather, he's longing, notice there, that we might be enriched by what we understand, that they may have the full riches of

complete understanding. When we learn of Christ, when he is proclaimed in the word, our souls are fed. We're enriched. We feel that we've gained something, don't we? There's something fresh, there's something new that has come to us which we've not seen before and we delight in it.

The treasury of God's grace in Christ should be distributed freely in the preaching of God's word, should be proclaimed. One thing you will always notice, where there is false teaching, where there is false Christianity, particularly, and other cults, there is a hiding away of certain things from the general populace. There is, oh well, that's only for the priests to know, or that's only for the so-and-sos to know in the things of God. But in true biblical preaching, there is a scattering and a sharing and a spreading of God's wonderful truth in all of its glory.

[35 : 42] And so it is here with Paul, and so it should be in our fellowship as well. So we see these things taking place. Are they happening? Do you find that you're being enriched in God's word, as Christ is proclaimed? Do you find that there is a love growing for your brother and sister in Christ and opportunities to serve? Do you find that you're being built up and strengthened in your faith as you read God's word and hear it? Then this is part of the maturing process. It's just one final thing as we bring our time in God's word to a close now. And it's there at the very end of the passage we read, where Paul speaks about the orderliness of their fellowship. He says this, For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit, and delight to see how orderly you are, how firm your faith in Christ is. Now, Paul doesn't call this one of the purposes of his ministry, but it seems to me to be the fruit of a church which is receiving the word of Christ and seeking to live it out, that there is orderliness. It's one of the things that blossoms and was blossoming in the church at Colossus that thrilled Paul. He wasn't able to be there physically. Remember, he's in prison simply for being a Christian, but he's heard news. He tells us about that earlier on in chapter 1, I've heard about your faith in Christ, your love for all the saints. He's heard. And in one sense, because of what he's heard, he's united with them. He feels one with them. I'm sure we have that experience too, don't we, when we hear missionary news from another part of the world about what God is doing in a particular regional district, and how Christians perhaps are seeing God's blessing, or even seeing persecutions. We feel one with them, don't we? We feel united with them, where we truly are, of course, because in Christ we are united. But rather, that Paul says, I can see how God is at work in your lives, and it gives me great delight and joy that you are orderly.

What does he mean? Does he mean, first of all, that they were, they weren't chaotic? We know the church in Corinth was a bit of a chaotic situation, people leaping up here and there, and things, people going off and doing their own thing. He doesn't just mean it wasn't chaotic, but he certainly doesn't mean that it was some sort of a straight-laced, ritualistic type of church, where everybody dotted the I and crossed the T, where everything was exactly as it should be and fitted into the box of their tradition. What is he talking about? I think he's talking rather about the fact that when the Word of God is applied to our lives, when we are those who are seeking together to hear Christ and live for Christ, there is a natural flowing in the Christian life. There is a flowing together. It's seen in public worship, but it's also seen in practice, in decision-making, in choices, in the way that we live. There's a natural rhythm that's born of the Holy Spirit's influence in our lives. So each one is marching in step with him. And in marching in step with him, we're marching in step with one another. Not always, not perfectly, as we said before, but certainly much more than we would be without the Word's influence. See, the Holy Spirit is always in agreement with the Scriptures. Why? Because he's the author of the Scriptures.

And the Holy Spirit, sorry, and the Word of God is always teaching us to follow the Holy Spirit because he's the source of the power by which we obey the Word. So Spirit and Word are coming together in the church at Colossus. Is the Spirit and the Word coming together in our church? Is the Spirit and the Word coming together in our lives? Are we flowing? Are we walking? Are we living? Are we growing and maturing in the faith? That surely should be our great desire, as it was Paul's as well.

Just close with these words of Paul. They're later on in Colossus, but they again give an emphasis and a sense of what we've been already saying. If he says this to them, let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. May God enable us and help us to do just that, that we may grow in him.