

Colossians 2:2-4



Would you prefer to receive good news or bad news?

I'm sure we all prefer good news, as it's so much more encouraging and we certainly need some! There is enough bad news around at the moment to discourage even the most positive person. That's just one of the many reasons why the Gospel message is so encouraging, as Jesus said: "take heart I have overcome the world".

Let's pray that we would be encouraged in heart and united in His love:

Heavenly father, we thank you for your grace and mercy over our lives; we thank you for the Good News of Jesus and your plan to rescue us from the dominion of darkness and bring us into the kingdom of the Son you love. Help us to fix our eyes on Jesus the author and finisher of faith and during these testing times let the washing with the water of your word reveal our deepest need in Christ; we ask you Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth and unite our hearts through the bond of peace. We ask you Father to fill us with the knowledge of your will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding, in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen.

Please open up your bibles to Colossians chapter 2

²My 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,

³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

⁴I tell you this so that no-one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.

What is Paul's purpose in writing these encouraging words to the believers in Colossae? Believers, whom he has never met, which also includes us!

May I suggest Paul's goal, inspired and led by the Holy Spirit, was to bring them and us into a deeper knowledge and understanding of Jesus, so that *we would be*:

1. Encouraged in heart and united in love
2. Filled with the riches of complete understanding

And, with this knowledge *to understand*:

1. The mystery of God, namely Christ
2. The treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hidden (for us) in Christ
3. How to avoid being deceived by fine-sounding arguments.

Background to the Colossian letter

When the Apostle Paul was imprisoned in Rome toward the end of his life, one of his faithful ministers Epaphras, visited him. He brought good news about what was happening in the church in Colossae and of the believer's faith in Jesus and the love they had for all the saints. Paul must have been so uplifted by hearing such good news while locked-down in Rome.

Although Paul had never visited the church in Colossae, he was greatly encouraged by how the message of salvation was impacting believers throughout the known world at that time and how the grace of God was understood by those who heard its truth.

Epaphras brought good news from the church but he also informed Paul of some people who were adding too and/or subtracting from the sufficiency and supremacy of Jesus Christ; these issues are dealt with in the first two chapters of the Colossian letter and we will take a look them in a moment.

As we read Paul's response to those who were introducing heresies, you will note he does not single out anyone by name or go into much detail about error but rather opposes their teaching by revealing God's truth and remaining steadfast to the central doctrine of the Christian faith, namely Jesus.

This is our purpose in studying God's word together this morning and at any other time we gather in His name. In fact, whenever we open our bibles we are to trust that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth and encourage our hearts to unite us in the love we have for God and for one another.

May I add that false teaching will always have the opposite effect; it will discourage hearts and disunite those who are deceived by it! Furthermore it rarely, if ever, leads to a fruitful and abundant life that faith in Jesus promises nor will it enable a believer to overcome the spirit of this age, the desires of the carnal nature nor the cunning schemes of the Devil!

False teaching was a problem in the early church and remains a problem today, especially with such easy access to the world-wide-web. The Apostle Peter says: "There are some who being ignorant of the truth and unstable in their walk, distort the word of God, as they do the rest of the scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16).

The internet *is* a marvellous way to gather information when used correctly but it does require tremendous spiritual wisdom and discernment to distinguish between truth and error!

When our son was a surf coach on Bondi beach in Australia, he would warn surfers about sharks in the bay and I say the same to you when surfing the internet: "watch out for sharks"! If you are new to the Christian faith and need some help finding the right material to study, please do ask a mature and trusted Christian brother or sister to help you.

Paul prayed earnestly for the Colossians at the beginning of this letter, asking *...that they would be filled with the knowledge of his will (that is God's will) through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*

He goes on to identify the bad news that Epaphras brought to him, which was a mix of Greek philosophy (that is man's wisdom), Jewish tradition (that is ritual and legalism) and pagan worship (which is a type of eastern mysticism). These errors were infiltrating the church and distorting the gospel truth i.e. the "Good News" of salvation in Christ alone, by faith alone. His perfect sacrifice being sufficient to pay for all who fall short of the glory of God and turn to the cross in repentance. Scripture proclaims that *"if you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved"*. (Romans 10:9)

Here are some examples of errors which deceived the believers:

2:8-10 ⁸*See to it that no-one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.*

Paul responds with Gospel truth: ⁹*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,* ¹⁰*and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.*

2:16-17 ¹⁶*therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.*

Paul responds with Gospel truth: ¹⁷*These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*

2:18-19 ¹⁸*Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind.*

Paul responds with Gospel truth: ¹⁹*They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.*

2:20-23 ²⁰*Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules:* ²¹*"Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"?*

Paul responds with Gospel truth: ²²*These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings.* ²³*Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*

Whichever form false teaching takes, it will always deny the sufficiency of Jesus (that is the shed blood of the lamb to pay for sin) and the supremacy of Jesus (that is His Deity). Heresies lead to a distortion of the truth, deception of those who listen to it and disunity amongst those who believe in it. Paul warns that false teaching will captivate your mind

by earthly thinking and ways rather than setting your heart on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Challenge this week:

We recognise there is distortion of truth in our world today; there is much to deceive believers and even more which will lead to disunity amongst God's people.

My counsel to you from scripture this morning is to discern God's truth from error and protect yourself from being deceived, discouraged and disunited. The only way to overcome error, is to learn what God has said in His word. The Holy Bible is our standard, our cannon, our measuring stick. *Sola scriptura*, which was the rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century.

Therefore, whatever questions arise, whatever doubts you have in life, if you are unsure of the next step to take – the answer is always found in the word of God (the *logos* word of God – which is found in Christ), so encouraging to know!

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (John 14:6) So we are to be wise and cautious in how Jesus is portrayed to us, as many will deny the sufficiency and supremacy of Christ, to their peril!

Application from what we have studied this morning:

- **Colossians 1:9** Pray as Paul did, that we would be filled with the knowledge of God's will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.
- **Acts 17:11** Read the bible, to search the scriptures daily and see if what is being taught about Jesus is in line with the truth of God's Holy Word.

Final thought: Take God at His word this morning and know Him through an intimate faith-relationship with Jesus; be filled with the Holy Spirit – the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and be encouraged in heart and united in love.

Make it your goal to encourage someone this week from the word of truth