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## Colossians 2:1-5 *Be an Encourager!*

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**General Idea:** The call to be an encourager is simple, yet so hard to follow sometimes. So much “stuff” gets in the way of His Way and our call to be an impact to others. Paul, even though in a heinous situation, takes the time to agonize, pray, and encourage his besieged church. His care and concern is shown even to those he does not personally know but who know him. This encouragement is personal, yet is not dependent onto only those who are close to him. Paul’s goal was that mutual support would flow into confidence. God knows that we all need this vital and personal impact to get us through life and ministry endeavors. The support of one for another must be shown both in a church collectively, and in individual persons in order to yield healthy relationships. Encouragement must be fulfilled in our relationship with Christ so that we are knit together by our love and Fruit. In so doing, we model and give assurance and hope that build upon one another’s faith and that display the wonders of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Our full confidence comes from the personal relationship with and impact we have in Christ. Therefore, it is our duty to exhibit it even when times are uncertain and wearisome. In so doing, others may receive a model of confidence and faith in Christ that will help them handle the adversities of life. God has a plan; it is secret to those who do not want to know it and open to those who know Him. It is simple: Christ is our Savior and Lord, and who we are is based on who we are in Him. Our true treasure is Christ and His empowerment, the impact as well as the knowledge, wisdom, and faith He gives us for daily living. All we need is hidden in Christ; yet, He gives us the key to open it up and empowers us to use it. In so doing, no one will be able to deceive us with false ideas or persuasive words. When we are uncertain as a Church, we should have people near and far to help us as well as the Holy Spirit’s empowerment. This strong faith in Christ as Lord should make us happy and content.

### **Contexts and Background:**

Paul was warning his readers not to buy into the false teachings that Christ was not sufficient or not fully divine, or that they needed extra wisdom found only from these so-called *teachers*. This passage is set in the language of an Olympic event—an athletic contest—and the efforts that must be put forth to “enter” and “place” in such an event. Paul equates this to the personal life and the spiritual life. To be successful, we have to extend our effort and dues in whatever event we enter; this applies to faith too. In addition, Paul alludes to “honor.” Being an athlete at that time was not just a personal honor; you represented your city and state and pointed to a greater reality and endeavor that showed *community*. This is a reflection of how we honor Christ by our active faith and how we dishonor Him by our apathy. As we face conflict, adversity, trials, and obstacles, we require training and preparation so we can be fit to run through them and not be tripped up by our fat or atrophy of non-preparation (Col. 1:29; 2:8).

### **Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:**

- *I want you to know.* Paul is being very persuasive, having been trained in such rhetoric. For a Greek, being persuasive and a person of influence was the utmost of importance as was seeking the truth. But truth and what was being propagated was not beneficial or even the real, true Truth. Paul uses the classic arguments to turn the tables and show that Truth is in Christ!
- *Conflict/Struggle.* This refers to “striving” as the competition and struggle an athlete goes through to train, prepare, and then compete. So it is with the faith. We receive it, but we have to continue to work on it, learn, grow, and build up our faith and maturity. If not, we would not be able to stand, let alone run in the race of life and faith (Col. 4:12).
- *Laodicea.* This is *Phrygia* in Asia, now modern *Pamukkale*. It sits ten miles west of the coast from *Colosse*. In Paul’s and John’s time, it was an important, prosperous, and wealthy city known for its medical schools as well as its flourishing banking and medical and textile industries. It was the capital of the “Cibryatic Convention,” a consortium of twenty-five townships. As with the other Roman cities, it had its temples and patron gods such as Apollo, Asclepius, Hades, Hera, and Zeus. This city also had a significant Jewish population. God called this church “lukewarm,” challenging them about their

spiritual condition that had turned into self-satisfaction and complacency. Some believe this was the place of the martyrdom of the Apostle Philip. Paul probably never met most of them, and from the context, the false teachings coming from the Colosse church were evident here too. Yet, he feels passionately for them. This is a model of friendship and more, expounding the “pastor’s heart” who cares for his people even when they are messing up (Col. 4:13-16; Rev. 3:14-22)!

- *Purpose.* This is knowing who we are in Christ and what He has done for us, then acting out our relationship and redemption by being obedient to God’s will. This is also our determination to place Him first in our lives and allow Him to lead. This was Paul’s mission, along with teaching, modeling, and encouraging others for the faith. This is what helps us spur on one another’s faith, as confidence regarding who we are in Christ and the veracity of the Bible’s teaching gives us greater substance for conviction and strength for living life and growing spiritually. A real, effectual, purpose-driven life is always about Christ as Lord and our surrender to His Lordship (Psalm 57; 138:7-8; Prov. 19:21; John 15; Rom. 8; Phil. 2:1-18; 2 Tim. 1:8-12)!
- *Be encouraged/comforted.* Meaning to call to one’s side, as to cheer, reassure, strengthen, comfort, and warn another person. Paul is showing us a picture of the loving shepherd. He is literally giving us a divine message, and handing over insights and truths from The Word of Christ (Acts 19:33; 1 Cor. 2:16; 11:2; 2 Thess. 3:6).
- *United/knit together in love.* Meaning to join together so a group is united in purpose and companionship, with love as the foundation. This is how a church and family must exist to be healthy. It is essential that the pastor, church leaders, and members be united in Christ, by His love and according to His Word so to exercise the full understanding of His call and instructions and thus dwell as a cohesive unity, a Body of Christ (Luke 10:25-29; John 4:24; 10:25-30; 17:21-23; Acts 2:4; Rom. 1:16-17; 12:1-3; 1 Cor. 12; Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 1:10; 5:30; Phil. 2:5-8; Col. 1; James 4:8-11).
- *Full riches/assurance.* Meaning the fullness and “super-abundance” we have in Christ, which gives us certainty and confidence. For the first century Jew, wisdom meant true wealth from God. The more you knew, the better you were in His sight. This produced arrogance and the lack of concern to applying His truth. This is actually partially true; for the more we learn about Him, the better we can model, teach, and worship Him—as long as our pride does not get in the way. Remove the arrogance, then the indifference starts to disappear, and service and maturity replace it (Job 28:12-19; Psalm 19:10; 119:14, 72, 127, 162; Prov. 3:13-15; Isa. 33:6).
- *Understanding/acknowledgement.* Meaning the firsthand, personal knowledge and recognition to act with discernment. Here, it means to know Christ and the fullness of the Gospel, to know Christ as being the assurance of our salvation, and be fully engaged in Him as the application of our faith. This refers to completely yielding to Christ as LORD. This means the “Christocentric” life as opposed to the “self-centered” life in which so many Christians engage. There is the old saying that “you are so heavenly-minded that you are of no earthly good.” This statement is backwards; we are called to be heavenly-minded and when we are, we are good for others too. Too many Christians are so earthly-minded that are of no good—period! They are not heavenly-minded and thus lead dysfunctional and purposeless lives (Col. 1:9; 2 Pet. 1:5-8).
- *Mystery... hidden.* Meaning unknowable, esoteric knowledge; but in Christ we can know Him intimately. Indicates that Christ is the Lord God Almighty who is the Messiah. God deigned to become incarnate to redeem us as well as to make this information available to us so we could know Him; He revealed Himself to us. This also means that which is extremely valuable, not what is unattainable or concealed. It refers to seeking hidden knowledge, which for a Christian, is in front of us and in plain view; it is fully and freely given to us by Christ. The only ones from whom it is hidden are those who do not know Christ. And the mystery, as in not being able to understand, is God’s true-Truth because they do not know Christ or have His Holy Spirit (Mark 4:22; Luke 8:17; John 1:18; 1 Cor. 1:21-25; Col. 1:9, 26; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:2-3).

- *Treasures*. The false teachers claimed to have secret wisdom to help a person gain spiritual powers, but the real treasure is the Truth of the Gospel (John 1:14; 1 Cor. 2:6-8; Eph. 1:8-9; 3:8-9; Col. 1:8; 2:9-10).
- *Wisdom*. This means the application of truth and being sensible with our actions. This leads to righteousness, holiness, and sanctification (Deut 4:6; 1 Kings 3:9; Psalm 119:97-98; Matt. 6:33; Rom. 11:33; 12:3; 1 Cor. 12:8; 1 Tim. 1:18-20)
- *Knowledge*. This means the apprehension of truth and prudence regarding our judgments. This leads to having the knowledge to build our faith, which must come before we apply our faith. But, real faith and spiritual growth must never rest on knowledge alone, for then it is empty and of no use (Luke 11:42; 18:10-14; John 14:1-6; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 2:8-9 James 2:14).
- *Deceive/beguile*. Meaning to miscalculate by thinking and reasoning illogically or falsely and then to delude, “con,” or mislead others. We cannot be deceived when our eyes are on Christ and His Word (Rom. 14: 23; Heb. 11:6; James 1:22; Rev. 13: 11-18).
- *Fine-sounding arguments/enticing words*. Means not being allured by a charismatic or charming person and thus buy into myths or false teaching. Or, being tickled by the latest trend fad or thought and not seeking the Truth of God’s Word. Thus, it is imperative that we exercise wisdom and knowledge to keep us away from bad choices. Too many people are easy swayed by cheap deception and do not exercise the discernment skills they have. If you can think, you can discern; the problem is that most people, Christians included, tend not to think and go by feelings that are distant from truth or facts or consequences. For the Greeks, it was considered unethical by the wise to use persuasion, regardless of facts and truth. Our political leaders can learn a thing or two here! Getting someone to believe something you know is not true or are not sure of its truth is very damaging to relationships and credibility (2 Peter 2: 17-22).
- *Absent from you in body*. Here, it is not a metaphysical event or an out of body experience or a trip to heaven like Paul expressed in 2 Corinthians 12. Rather, here it is identification and compassion for those who are far away. It is a Greek expression for intimacy as the letter written was a “surrogate” for one to be there in person; thus, one’s presence is there “in spirit” even when one is not there in reality. When we exercise encouragement, we transcend distance and expand relationships (1 Cor. 5:3; 14:40).
- *In spirit*. This is a prime theme of friendship and the longing to help others strive for the faith and be better in community and cooperation rather than isolation and emptiness. This is a saying that means affection and intimacy, that *I am with you even though I am not physically there* (1 Cor. 5:3-4; 1 Thess. 2:17).
- *How firm/steadfast your faith*. A military term to be orderly and fall in line and be ready for battle so not to be pressed by the enemy. Here, it indicates being ready by one’s solid hold of faith because we are in the stronghold of communal faith, a strong church. Reports of good faith brought joy to Paul who was in prison and could not be there in person (1 Tim. 4:15-16).

### **Devotional Thoughts and Applications:**

The theme from Colossians thus far is *Lordship*. Is Christ Lord over you? Has He come to bear upon your life? Who is He to you? Who are you in Him? Can you answer these questions? If not, what is in the way? His redemptive work must break your will so you are in Him and He is not just a part of you but THE part of you (John 3:30)! This is what spurs us on and gives us the means to be encouragers and faith developers to one another in unity and love. This true, spiritual growth will usually be slow to build and will be humble. It will show meekness and never pride. If you have pride in your spiritual life, you do not have spiritual life, but rather a self-directed life that will adversely affect all of your life. If you are a leader and it

is all about what you have done, you are prideful and definitely in the wrong profession; the theme of *Lordship* has no place in you! Get out of the church and get on your knees until you are right with God; then rejoin the church!

**The Essential Inductive Questions** (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

**Additional Questions:**

1. What does it mean to you to be an encourager? How is it simple? Why is it so hard to do sometimes?
2. Where do you find your confidence? How does it affect your personal relationships and the impact you have in Christ and His Church?
3. What gets in your way of showing care and support to another person? How would being better at encouragement help you be more of an impact to others?
4. How is encouragement personal? Why is it not dependent on how close we are to someone in personal relationship or location?
5. Why does Paul show concern to those he does not personally know? How can this help you better show kindness and encouragement to strangers? How would this benefit you and the church?
6. How does teaching assurance and modeling hope help build one another's faith? How would this help you display the wonders of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?
7. How is your church a group that is united in purpose and companionship with love as the foundation? If not, what can you do about it?
8. If someone asked you what your true treasure is, how would you respond? How about from a stranger or from a church or family member?
9. Why is it that to grow in the maturity of faith, we need to know that who we are is based on who we are in Christ?
10. How have you experienced the empowerment and impact, as well as the knowledge, wisdom, and faith Christ gives? How has that helped you in your daily living?
11. What can you do to prevent people from being able to deceive you with false ideas or persuasive ideas and words?
12. Why do we as Christians, saved by Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, still need the love and support of one another to get us through life and ministry endeavors? What does your church need to do to prompt and promote this more?