

Christ Community Covenant Church
Colossians: Redeemed - The Trouble with Truth
Pastor Dave Scherrer - June 28, 2015

Continuing on with our study in Colossians. Let's take just a moment and review; We have seen that Jesus is preeminent, that everything has been made by Him and through Him and for Him. And let me digress for a moment and point out that when the Bible says everything, that's what it means. This construct shatters our idea that some things are secular and some things are sacred.

This last week we learned that in the light of this glorious truth, we who have put our trust in Jesus are utterly redeemed, thoroughly and fully and completely reconciled. There is no part of my life, past present or future that needs any additional cleaning. There is nothing I can do to earn the status of being a good Christian.

As we mentioned last week, this little letter was written on the occasion of a troubling heretical teaching that was filtering into the new fellowship. Here in the second chapter the culture of Colossae has trouble with this truth as Paul is outlining it.

The Trouble with Truth

Of course as we are seeing in our post-modern world we have a trouble with truth too. Without getting too lost in philosophy this morning, postmodern thought is a relatively recent reaction or response to the so called Age of Modernity. Sociologists will tell us that most of us in this room have lived as cultural residents of the epoch known as modernity. But there are three epochs that we need to keep in mind; Pre-modern, Modern and Post Modern.

Premodern: (1000 -1650) The primary epistemology of the premodern period was based upon revealed knowledge from authoritative sources. In premodern times it was believed that the Ultimate Truth could be known and the way to this knowledge is through direct revelation. This direct revelation was generally assumed to come from God or a god. The church, being the holders and interpreters of revealed knowledge, were the primary authority source in premodern time.

Modernism (1650-1950's) Two new approaches to knowing became dominant in the modern period. The first was empiricism (knowing through the senses) which gradually evolved into scientific empiricism or modern science with the development of modernist methodology. The second epistemological approach of this period was reason or logic. Often, science and reason were collaboratively or in conjunction with each other. As the shift in power moved away from the church as the sole authority and governments and kings and universities scholars took over as the primary sources of authority. Oftentimes, a religious perspective was integrated into these modern authority sources, but the church no longer enjoyed the privileged power position in the position of defining truth.

Postmodernism (1950's to current times). Postmodernism has brought with it a questioning of the previous approaches to knowing. Instead of relying on one approach to knowing, they advocate for an epistemological pluralism which utilizes multiple ways of knowing. This can include the premodern ways (revelation) and modern ways (science & reason), along with many other ways of knowing such as intuition, relational, and spiritual. In the postmodern era, truth becomes very personal. Post moderns reject the idea of one single comprehensive economic or political or religious galvanizing thought or meta-theme.

You have heard the term absolute truth. A tightly held pre-modern and modern value is that there exists non-negotiable absolute truth. A post-modern proponent would propose that truth may be unknowable altogether and is otherwise certainly relative and pluralistic and eminently personal. Tolerance regarding truth is a very postmodern concept. Let's for a minute see how this might work its way into our headlines.

Do you remember the name Rachael Dolozal recently in the news? If not you might remember her pictures and controversy regarding her claims regarding her ethnicity.



Director of NAACP Spokane Washington

From a very young age, felt a spiritual, visceral, this feeling of central connection with 'black is beautiful,' you know, just the black experience and wanting to celebrate that. I was totally conditioned to not own that and to be limited to whatever biological identity was thrust upon me. + *Rachael Doloza*

Truth; is it anything we perceive it to be based on our own autonomous feelings and beliefs or is it something much more universal? I was a double major in psychology and philosophy in college (you thought you had a tough time getting a job!). There is this word that academicians use to identify the study of truth. “**Epistemology.**”

Epistemology

Objective Truth – Usually defined by that which can be empirically proven, a product of our five senses and the math and science and experimentation that helps to establish objective truth.

Moral Truth – Having a sense of what society deems is the proper way to behave in society.

Spiritual Truth – Often understood as the product of divine revelation, but sometimes it is thought of to be the product of intense individual discipline, perhaps harsh physical challenges or through the use of various drugs.

I have to admit that all these can change or mature. Or deteriorate for that matter.

Objective truth used to tell us the world was flat and that our planet was the center of the spatial universe. In the premodern time of Galileo and Copernicus they ran up against the supreme religious powers of that day and were imprisoned for their new understanding view of truth.

Moral truth seems to move in society and culture as well. There used to be moral objections to things like playing cards, movies, dancing and the like. Now churches tend to be less black and white on things like that. Morally we have seen hundreds of changes, why even running in church isn't as big a sin as it used to be.

Where my concern for truth rests this morning is in the area of Divine Revelation. From a person's understanding of how truth might change or mature objectively and morally then what is to stop us from believing that truth changes in the spiritual realm. How a person understands Divine revelation will then impact their pursuit of truth in the other arenas of objective and moral truth.

Let's dig in here for a minute just before we address our text and find out why I am so fixated on this discussion of truth this morning. In the gospel of John we read:

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

These are non-negotiable statements of absolute conviction. They make a difference in everyday workings of our lives. And in the first century these axioms were being challenged.

The Colossian Heresy: Gnostic or Judaizer?

Let's finally get to our passage and see how these challenges are met by Paul in this letter:

Colossians 2:6-7

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

This is how we were taught to believe in Christ. Having received Him, we make it our lives to be rooted in him, diving down deep into His Spirit so that moment by moment we can walk according to these truths. At the time of the first century there was an emerging threat to the Gospel of Christ. It is called Gnosticism. The word "Gnosticism" comes from the Greek word "gnosis" which means "knowledge." There were many groups that were Gnostic and it isn't possible to easily describe the nuances of each variant of Gnostic doctrines. However, generally speaking, Gnosticism taught that salvation is achieved through special knowledge (gnosis). The unknowable God was far too pure and perfect to have anything to do with the material universe which was considered evil. Therefore, God generated lesser divinities, or *emanations*.

Gnostics taught that Jesus was one of these emanations. Since, according to the Gnostics, matter is evil, deliverance from material form was attainable only through *special knowledge* revealed by special Gnostic teachers. Gnosticism is still with us today in many forms and even some major cult Christian expressions have doctrine that matches up to this heresy. The point here is that you should have Jesus but you also need a special knowledge that only some have in order to be saved. We see evidence of this kind of creeping heresy in the Colossians letter as we read on:

Colossians 2:8-10

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirit of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

But scholars will tell us that Gnosticism was predominantly a second century expression and this book was written in the first century, maybe AD 62. At that time there was another heresy that was forming in the early church that said we are saved by faith, but we also need to keep the Jewish law; the Torah. The focus was on circumcision and certain diets and washing ceremonies. We see Paul address this heresy also:

Colossians 2:13-17

¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. ¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

'Jesus plus nothing is everything': Why is this important to me?

When I allow the liar to get a foothold into my mind, lies that I believe about God eventually translate into lies that I believe about me and you and how we are to live. We at 4Cs have elevated three words that the Scriptures celebrate as values of God Himself. Life, Light and Love. And the evil one has distributed lies concerning the nature and sanctity of life. Lies concerning love. And lies concerning light or truth. When we engage in these lies we begin to manipulate the very understanding of who God and how He rules.

And these lies can be compelling.

Check out the testimony of Abby Johnson/**Unplanned** at RightNowMedia.com to see how God's truth concerning life changed Abby's entire world.

On Friday the Supreme Court ruled that marriages between same sex couples was legal and by ruling this decision, overruled the prerogative of state rule to decide on the nature of what marriage should be. By way of cultural moral truth this value has been changing quite rapidly over the last 25 to 50 years.

[Homosexuality had been officially classified as a mental disorder in the APA's first *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-I) in 1952. There it was designated as a "sociopathic personality disturbance." Viewing homosexuality as a mental illness was not controversial at the time as it coincided with prevailing societal attitudes. DSM-II, published in 1968, listed homosexuality as a sexual deviation. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality from its official *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) in 1973.]

And the cultural drift did not start here with these issues that capture the front pages this weekend. They began in the mid-20th century when we began to see the cultural normalization of divorce as a now value neutral decision and then flowed closely by the cultural normalization of sexual intimacy outside of marriage with many, to perhaps most, younger people either rejecting the institution of marriage or participating in physical intimacy prior to marriage. The drift has been steady and sure.

Scripture has documented the beginning of marriage from the very start. In Genesis 2 and again in the words of Jesus himself recorded in Matthew 19 we read, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." The orthodox view of marriage according to Scripture as the supreme good is heterosexual, monogamous, faithful and permanent for life. The Evangelical Covenant denomination, of which we are a part, has stated that the rule of life regarding sexual intimacy is celibacy outside of marriage and fidelity in marriage. I too hold that this is God's standard. There are reasons for this standard that are far loftier than what we can get into now. I hope to do a series on *Intimacy According to God* in the fall. But the short answer to this is not that God wants to rain on our parade and take away our fun. Just the opposite. If we continue to read in Genesis we read that the man and woman are together and are *naked and unashamed*. Perfect innocent intimacy and a complete lack of fear. This is freedom.

All of us have been affected by the heartache of broken marriages, the consequences of sexual intimacy outside of marriage, and now I believe that this ruling merely gives evidence that humankind, left to itself, will drift away from the spiritual and moral truths of God. This reality means that our very definition of God is under attack, just as it was in AD 62. It turns out that Truth has a name! Jesus Christ!

John 8:32

And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Don't be afraid though church. There is hope.

I believe that in the next several decades there will be a great opportunity to engage those who do not know Christ with His life changing and merciful love in increasingly profound ways. A love and life and light compelling forgiveness and transcendent peace that will draw hundreds of millions to his Kingdom. I believe that.

However, I also believe that the use of anger and fear and guilt and shame and isolation and marginalization will only further dim the light of truth. So our purposes are the same as always, to Know Christ and experience His life saving love and then compassionately and urgently share . one beggar to another . where to find the Bread of Eternal Life.

Discussion Questions:

Re-read Colossians 2:1-17. What in this passage sticks out for you? How come?

On Sunday, Dave reviewed chapter 1 of Colossians and reminded us of the preeminence of Christ (vs 15-20) and of how we have been radically reconciled to God (vs 21-23). And chapter two starts with a ¶Therefore. That means the thesis of chapter two depends on the fact of chapter one. So what is the compelling fact of chapter one, and what is the thesis of chapter two?

Chapter two takes doctrine about the nature of God and salvation and turns it into a practical theology that we can apply to our lives.

Can you think of any philosophies or human traditions that distract us from the gospel of Christ Alone?

Do you think there are still religious practices that seem to imply that you would be a better Christian if you also did this _____?

Verses 6 and 7 are really important to Paul's understanding of the Christian life. How do you understand:

- %Walking in Him+
- %Being rooted in Him+
- %Being built up in Him+
- %Being established in the faith+
- %Abounding in thanksgiving+?

If we do these well does the rest take care of itself? How so?