

All in One Colossians 2

I can still feel the excitement I had when my dad gave me my first multi-tool. I was going on a school camp in year 6, and we would be staying in tents – cooking over a fire. Every student was supposed to bring his or her own cutlery. My dad surprised me by getting me a multi-tool that was cutlery and a whole lot more.

Have you had a multi-tool? Handy things they are. Mine had a fork, spoon, knife, nail file, scissors, a couple screwdrivers, corkscrew – even a little saw. It came with a leather pouch that fastened to my belt loop. I wore it with pride.

It is great having something that is all in one – everything you need in one package. Jesus is like that – but in a far better and more perfect way. He is everything you need for this life and the next.

Now in saying that I feel sacrilegious. A multi-tool is actually not a good metaphor for Jesus. When it came to actually using my multi-tool, it wasn't nearly as handy as I thought it would be – too chunky to use as a knife, too stout to use as a fork or spoon – and rather difficult to clean up afterwards. And the scissors? Utterly useless.

Jesus is the opposite. When we have Him, usefulness begins great and only gets better.

But there is a more important way that the analogy breaks down. A multi-tool works best when we control it. We take it in our hand and make it do what we want it to do. But Jesus works best when He controls us. He takes us in His hand, and makes us do what He wants us to do . . . so we become what He wants us to be.

Nevertheless, all-in-one is a good way to think about Jesus. He is all that you need.

Sermon in a Sentence: **Keep it simple – only Jesus.**

Colossians 2 is an emotional argument from Paul. In this chapter, we learn what the problem was in Colossae – they were making things too complicated. Paul, therefore, tells them to keep it simple – only Jesus.

He begins with . . .

1. A Passionate Prayer

Colossians 2:1-10 (NKJV)

¹For I want you to know what **a great conflict** I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,

What does Paul mean – great conflict (or struggle)? He's talking about the warfare that is waged through prayer. Yes, the gospel is simple – only Jesus, but the gospel has many enemies intent

on making it complicated. Whenever the gospel becomes complicated, it always loses its freedom and joy.

Right now in Afghanistan, our country has brave defence force personnel fighting for our freedom and joy as a nation. Afghanistan is a long way from Australia. Why do we have to fight there? Because freedom and joy must always be forcefully protected no matter how distant the conflict may be.

The same is true with the gospel. We must fight to preserve the joy and freedom of salvation. Paul was in Rome – a long way from Colossae (in fact, he had never even been to Colossae), but he is fighting for them nonetheless – fighting in prayer.

For whom are you fighting in prayer? Prayer that is passionate. Prayer that is targeted. Prayer that is simple – only Jesus.

Just as the quickest way for our country to disintegrate is to take our freedoms for granted, so the quickest way for a Christian family or a Christian church to disintegrate is to take our freedoms in Christ for granted.

Therefore, fight for the simplicity of the gospel. Only Jesus. Fight in prayer for your children. Fight in prayer for your parents. Fight in prayer for your church.

Many of you fought in prayer for Alex when he suffered the stroke that ended his earthly life. That is the kind of passion Paul had every day even for people like the Colossians whom he never met. Will you be vigilant in prayer? Please do – before a crisis strikes . . . because it is a war out there.

You might wonder what you should pray for. Notice what Paul prays for . . .

Colossians 2:2-3 (NKJV)

² that their hearts may be **encouraged**, being knit together in **love**, and *attaining* to **all riches** of the **full assurance** of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, ³ in whom are hidden **all the treasures** of wisdom and knowledge.

Paul prays for it all! All assurance. All understanding. All wisdom. All knowledge. Imagine having life all figured out so that you can be calm and content in every circumstance. More than this – to be joyful and free in every circumstance.

That's what Paul is praying for. And it is actually quite simple. You don't need a university degree to have it. You don't have to pass a test. Even a child can attain these riches and treasures. Where is all of it hidden? Only Jesus.

If you have Jesus, you have it all.

Paul uses the word 'mystery' in verse 2. This connects back to chapter 1, verse 27.

Colossians 1:27 (NKJV)

²⁷ To them God willed to make known what are the **riches** of the glory of this **mystery** among the Gentiles: **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**.

Keep it simple – only Jesus.

The believers at Colossae, however, were starting to make the Christian life complicated. Some teachers within their church were saying that Jesus was not enough – and they were rather convincing. Whether the Colossian believers were convinced by this false teaching, or whether they just wanted to play it safe and keep everybody happy, we don't know. But we do know that they started adding to Jesus. Complicating the simple gospel.

Paul's passionate prayer continues:

Colossians 2:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴ Now this I say lest anyone should **deceive** you with **persuasive words**. ⁵ For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your *good order* and the *steadfastness* of your faith in Christ.

The words *order* and *steadfastness* are military terms, which can be summarised with one key Christian concept: discipline. Just as a soldier has a simple task, but must remain disciplined – undistracted – to be successful, so the Christian has a simple task – know, trust and follow Jesus only – and yet we, too, must be disciplined daily not to become distracted.

Keep it simple – only Jesus.

Paul now shifts his attention to identifying the persuasive words which were deceiving the Colossians. It is good for us to hear this, because the same persuasive words are distracting many people today, including professing believers. Paul now makes . . .

2. A Perceptive Plea

Colossians 2:6-7 (NKJV)

⁶ As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷ rooted and built up in Him and established in the **faith**, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

Paul begins this plea by again repeating the principle: keep it simple. You were not saved by any effort or qualification on your part – you received it when you received Christ by faith. Simple.

But there are two complicating notions that attack this simplicity. These rob us of joy, freedom . . . and as Paul says in verse 7, thanksgiving. What are these complicating notions?

The answer comes in verse 8. One robber is religion. The other robber is mysticism.

Colossians 2:8 (NKJV)

⁸ Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the **tradition of men**, according to the **basic principles** of the world, and not according to Christ.

The word *philosophy* is broader than we might think – it is not some university subject; it is any way of thinking. In this sense, someone who lives for beer and sport is a philosopher just as much as someone who lives for academic study. Add either one to Jesus, and you have empty deceit – something that will never satisfy in the end.

I said earlier that the two robbers were religion and mysticism. That is what we see next in verse 8 . . . and Paul elaborates in the rest of the chapter.

Religion is the *tradition of men*. Mysticism is the *basic principles of the world*. Both of these are enemies of the gospel.

A. Religion

The religion that was infiltrating and infecting the Colossians was Judaism. The argument went something like this from false teachers . . .

‘It’s all well and good that you believe in Jesus . . . but don’t forget that Jesus was a Jew, and Jews are the chosen people. So if you really want to be acceptable to God, you must become Jewish – be circumcised and keep the Jewish festivals and traditions.’

Paul speaks of this later in the chapter. See if you can pick up on the Jewish references in these verses:

Colossians 2:11-17 (NKJV)

¹¹In Him you were also **circumcised** with the **circumcision** made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the **circumcision** of Christ, ¹²buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, ¹⁴having wiped out the **handwriting of requirements** that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. ¹⁶So let no one judge you in **food** or in **drink**, or regarding a **festival** or a **new moon** or **sabbaths**, ¹⁷which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

Do you see the contrast? Religion says, ‘You must do something to make yourself acceptable to God.’ In this case, Judaism says, ‘you must be circumcised; you must keep the law (*handwriting of requirements*); you must be kosher in your eating and drinking; you must observe the festivals and Sabbaths.’

But Paul says it is all in Jesus. When you trust Jesus, you are circumcised in your heart once and forever – nothing more to do. When you trust Jesus, the law is fulfilled once and forever – nothing more to do. When you trust Jesus, the traditional festivals and Sabbaths are complete once and forever – nothing more to do.

Keep it simple – only Jesus.

I would suggest to you that religion still gets in the way of Jesus. Are you making it complicated?

There are those who would judge and accuse as Paul says in verse 16 – ‘Did you eat meat during Lent? God have mercy on you.’ ‘You didn’t have holy communion today? How can you be saved?’ ‘You aren’t praying the rosary? Aren’t praying to Mary? Aren’t venerating the saints? How can you, then, call yourself a follower of Jesus?’

To be sure, the Baptists have had their rules, too. ‘True Christians only use the King James Bible.’ ‘True Christians don’t watch television or go to the movies.’ ‘True Christians don’t play cards or have fun.’

We could go on all day about traditions that get in the way of the simplicity of the gospel. Elijah told me last week that some Romanian believers who migrated to Australia were offended because Australian women don’t wear head coverings at church. They couldn’t accept that a woman could be a Christian and not wear a scarf.

Keep it simple – only Jesus.

Let me ask you. Is religion getting in the way of the gospel in your life? Are you more afraid of what people think about you than about what God says?

Don’t let your joy and freedom be taken away by unbiblical and futile rules and traditions.

We now come to the second robber:

B. Mysticism

I take you back to verse 8. The phrase that is translated in the NKJV *basic principles* actually is a reference to spiritism. Here’s how the same verse reads in the ESV.

Colossians 2:8 (ESV)

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the **elemental spirits** of the world, and not according to Christ.

This makes sense in the broader context of chapter 2. Notice how Paul elaborates:

Colossians 2:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵Having disarmed **principalities** and **powers**, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

This is a clear reference to demons – or *devils*, a word that means *accusers*. Satan accuses us before God; before people; even before ourselves – wanting us to feel insecure and defeated all the time. But Jesus has already triumphed over all of them – setting us free.

Paul speaks of this again a few verses later:

Colossians 2:18-23 (ESV)

¹⁸Let no one disqualify you, insisting on **asceticism** and **worship of angels**, going on in detail about **visions**, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ¹⁹and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

Asceticism is the idea that I can make myself more acceptable to God by denying myself pleasure. It is the idea ‘no pain, no gain’ – which is contrary to the simple gospel which is all about ‘His pain, my gain’.

Catherine of Genoa was an ascetic. She drank the pus of leper patients to prove her devotion to God – what a silly exercise. Another man sat on a pole for years; another ate nothing but bread, water and salt; and another did not speak at all for one full year.

Does deprivation make us more holy? Paul continues . . .

²⁰ If with Christ you died to the **elemental spirits** of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— ²¹ **“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”** ²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? ²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and **asceticism** and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

In the Philippines, as David and Vivianne can tell you, there are people who are nailed to crosses during the passion season every year – severity to the body. They do this to prove their devotion to God . . . but does this really achieve anything for their soul? No.

Only Jesus does that.

Mysticism is a major problem today. Mysticism is secret knowledge of the spirit world – and it is promoted in many ways. New Age medicine. Angel guides. Extreme dieting. Eastern religions – Buddhism, Taoism, Animism. Controlled exercise – yoga, Tai Chi.

Paul rightly says that these have the appearance of doing something worthwhile, but have *no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh*. You can abuse and deprive yourself from now to eternity and you’ll never make up for the sin in your soul.

Only Jesus does that.

Do you understand Paul’s perceptive plea? Keep it simple. As you are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone . . . so live your life. Every day commune with the person Jesus – pray to Him, depend on Him, trust in Him, follow Him, obey Him.

Never complicate it by adding religion or mysticism to Him.

Keep it simple – only Jesus.

Paul states the argument succinctly in verses 9-10.

⁹ For in Him dwells all the **fullness** of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰ and **you are complete** in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

The false teachers say, ‘You must do this and this and this to be right.’ The mystics say, ‘You must know this hidden secret and this hidden secret and this hidden secret to be right.’

Paul says no. Only Jesus.

Verse 9 destroys the ‘hidden secret’ of the Greeks – that matter is evil and spirit is good – because Jesus was all the fullness of God’s goodness in a material body.

Verse 10 destroys the 'hidden secret' about self-deprivation and spirit beings, because Jesus is the head over all. And we are complete when we are in Him – no religious rules and traditions required.

We can express this as an algebraic formula. You'll see the contrast.

$X + 1 > X$. . . as in $5 + 1 = 6 (>5)$ or $10 + 1 = 11 (>10)$.

But, $\text{Jesus} + 1 < \text{Jesus}$. . . as in $\text{Jesus} + \text{circumcision} < \text{Jesus only}$; or $\text{Jesus} + \text{self deprivation} < \text{Jesus only}$; or $\text{Jesus} + \text{angels} < \text{Jesus only}$; or $\text{Jesus} + \text{Mary} < \text{Jesus only}$; or $\text{Jesus} + \text{whatever you might add} < \text{Jesus only}$.

So let's not make it complicated. Let's keep it simple – Jesus only.

Love Him. Serve Him. Trust Him. Enjoy the freedom and joy that He gives in the gospel.

And then live in the holiness you have received from Him . . . and fight the good fight of the faith . . . for simplicity's sake.