

Intro

In search of certainty. One thing people long for in life and find beyond their grasp is certainty.

- 1) That investments will turn out well
- 2) That I'll have enough for retirement
- 3) That I won't get laid off
- 4) That the furnace won't go
- 5) That my health won't fail
- 6) That that hard conversation will turn out well
- 7) And on and on

As a culture we want certainty in some areas, but not when it comes to our spiritual beliefs. We want certainty in our investments, but when it comes to our spiritual beliefs generally people go with whatever feels right or seems most appealing or whatever the culture is saying.

This morning, Paul encourages us to press on towards complete certainty when it comes to our trust in Jesus. Certainty can be attained. Certainty gives shape to our lives.

READ PASSAGE: Colossians 2:1-5

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

Paul has warned us about shifting from the faith. Now he provides us with a strategy for fighting “plausible arguments” that lead people to shift from the faith.

Point 1: Pastoral ministry cultivates encouraged hearts (2:1-2)

“**For**” picks up what was just said. Paul went to great lengths to reach Gentiles with the gospel and bring them to maturity = completeness. His work is a **struggle** = gladiator language, physical combat, fighting to the death. Metaphorically battling obstacles until the goal (victory) is achieved. Not quitting. And Paul is able to do this because Jesus is providing him with inner strength.

He's doing this for the Colossians, the Laodiceans (city 11 miles away), and for all Christians who haven't seen him personally.

How is Paul struggling?

- 1) He's not quitting despite opposition.
- 2) He's praying for those Christian churches he's heard about from prison.
- 3) He's disciplining people from prison.
- 4) He's evangelizing from prison.
- 5) He's writing letters from prison = urging the Colossians to not to shift from the gospel.

Why is Paul doing this?

“that their hearts may be encouraged” – 2:2

“**that**” indicates purpose. He wants Christians to be an encouraged people. “**their hearts**” indicates what part of us needs encouragement.

What is our heart?

Heart here represents our whole inner self. Our desires, our affections, our feelings, our intentions, our attitudes, our loves, our thought life, our values.

In your thought life, be encouraged. In your emotions, your feelings, be encouraged. In your desires, be encouraged. Be encouraged to want what God wills.

What exactly is encouragement?

This is a term we throw around. Encouragement brings different thoughts to mind. Do we know what encouragement actually is?

There's two senses of the word that could fit here:

- 1) To encourage someone towards a certain behavior or course of action
 - Paul urging believers to offer their lives as worship by living holy (Rom 12:1)
 - Paul urging believers to beware of those who bring division and false doctrine (Rom 16:17)
 - Paul urging the Corinthians to imitate his behavior (1 Cor 4:16)
 - Paul urging believers to walk worthy of their calling (Eph 4:1)
- 2) To bring comfort to someone (cheer or courage as well)
 - God as the “*God of all comfort*” who comforts Paul in his affliction (2 Cor 1:3-4)
 - God comforting downcast Paul by the presence of Titus (2 Cor 7:6)
 - Believers encouraged, or comforted, by the fact that they will be reunited with believing loved ones who've already died when Jesus returns (1 Thess 4:18)

I think Paul's sense here is hearts encouraged to move in a certain direction: “*to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ.*”

That's hearts motivated to increase in wisdom and knowledge of the truth. That's encouragement to progress in our thought life. Encouragement to learn more about Jesus. To be more rooted in God's word. Encouragement to find “full assurance” in Jesus.

Application

Is this what I'm after? Am I straining myself so that your hearts will be encouraged to progress in confidence in Jesus?

Elders, is this your goal? Are you struggling that this body will find greater confidence in Jesus?

Is this what we're after as a church? A people progressing in the wisdom and knowledge of Christ to the point that we don't shift from the Bible. A people who know what we have in Christ to the point where the world's logic and allurements are unsatisfying. That's the maturity, the completeness, Paul is after.

Point 2: Unity cultivates encouraged hearts (2:2)

What strengthens and maintains encouragement to progress in confidence in Jesus?

“*being knit together in love*” – 2:2

“*being knit together in love*” supports pursuing wisdom and knowledge → certainty → firmness & good order

Illustrations

Love is like a thread that holds us together. What happens when there's a loose string on your clothing and you pull it? You undo the hem or the seam. Some with the button. Pulling the string from the button releases the button from the clothing. Love is like the thread that holds clothing together.

Or think of a broken figurine held together by super glue. Without the super glue, the figurine wouldn't remain attached. Love is like super glue that holds two items together. Without the glue, without love, separation would occur.

The giving and receiving of love in the local church helps us keep moving in the right direction together.

What is love?

▪ love = high regard, affection, cherishing someone = affectionate devotion to someone that expresses itself in tangible action

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

- 1) Patient or forbearing
- 2) Acts kindly
- 3) Not jealous
- 4) Not boastful
- 5) Not arrogant
- 6) Not indecent behavior
- 7) Not insisting on its own way
- 8) Not irritable or easily provoked
- 9) Not resentful, grudge-holding, unforgiving
- 10) Not rejoicing in sin
- 11) Rejoices in truth
- 12) Believes the best of others
- 13) Hopes the best for others

Summary in the local church: affectionate devotion to one another where we bear with one another (e.g., forgiveness, not easily offended), treat one another well, refrain from selfishness, think the best of one another, and love righteousness while never approving of sin.

Need for local church

Paul's line of thinking indicates the necessity of the local church. An encouraged people progressing in confidence in Jesus requires being part of a people knit together by love. No local church = not held together by love = believers who aren't progressing. Loving local church community fosters maturity.

Church membership

A local church community with a maturity focus is knit together in love. Love by definition is an expression of affectionate devotion. That's commitment to one another in the local church producing commitment to maturity.

What's church membership? Entering into covenant with one another. Formalizing our commitment to one another. Kind of like the marriage covenant. In church membership we formally enter into commitment to one another to be "*knit together in love.*"

This is what I'm asking. Pray to God about church membership. Ask him for guidance. Consider the value of the formal commitments of church membership.

Point 3: Encouraged hearts cultivate certainty in Christ (2:2-3)

Our hearts need to be encouraged so that we desire “*to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ.*” Full assurance and knowledge of God’s mystery = riches.

Illustration

Think the golden treasure in a pirate movie. Treasure seekers go to great lengths to get the map. Then they brave the waters and whatever competition is seeking to beat them to the treasure. They put life on the line to get the treasure because they really value it. So it is with the knowledge of Christ. We should go to great lengths to discover the knowledge of Christ.

Do you treasure knowledge of Jesus? Is God’s word riches to you?

Full assurance

The first of the riches is “*full assurance of understanding.*” This could also be translated “complete certainty” or “absolutely sure.” That’s understanding Bible truths and being completely certain about those truths. It’s one thing to know some of the truths in the Bible. It’s another thing to have absolute certainty, full confidence in what God says.

God’s mystery

A mystery is a truth once hidden but now revealed. Christ is the mystery. Last week, “*Christ in you*” was the mystery. Truths about Jesus were once hidden. Truths we find in 1:15-20. Like God the Son has been holding the universe in place ever since he participated in creating it.

“in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”

The treasures are found in Christ. Wisdom being skillful use of truth. Knowledge being the truths we know. All wisdom and knowledge is found in Jesus. On the other hand, being ignorant about Jesus = lacking in wisdom and knowledge. The only way to gain wisdom and knowledge is through knowing Jesus. So don’t look for wisdom in contrary sources.

Non-Christian

What Paul is saying is that complete certainty of God’s promises comes through knowing Jesus. The Christian religion is a religion of certainty. God wants us to be certain. When we read the Bible, the Holy Spirit confirms in our spirit that what we are reading is true. God produces the certainty, but certainty comes to us reading the Bible, hearing sermons, reading Christian books. Bible meditation produces certainty because that’s what the Spirit uses. If doubt is a problem, read your Bible more!

The fall’s assumed. We’re a broken people. God’s holiness is assumed. God doesn’t tolerate rebellion. Our sin is assumed. We’re alienated from God because of our rebellion. So we need to be reconciled to God.

In our broken condition, we learn about Jesus. We learn that he died for our sins. We learn that we need a substitute to take the punishment our rebellion deserves. We learn that Jesus promises eternal life to all who repent and believe. God will fix our broken world. Sin and death will end. We learn that God is merciful to sinners.

We learn that if we repent and believe, we’ll receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

All of God’s promises are found in Jesus. And Jesus alone.

Knowledge matters

We learn that knowledge matters. We need more than affection for one another to be a local church. We need shared beliefs. Paul isn’t telling people to turn off their minds and just love one another. He’s saying loving one another in local church community fosters thinking more deeply about Jesus. Love fosters maturity which requires knowledge.

Romans 14 says Christians can fellowship in the local church without sharing all the same convictions. Unity ≠ uniformity. Unity ≠ don't think deeply about the Bible. Unity = commitment to one another and a pressing on together towards greater knowledge and maturity.

Pursue wisdom and knowledge together while loving one another.

Point 4: Certainty cultivates rejection of deceptive logic (2:4)

I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. – 2:4

“in order that” = purpose. Encouragement to progress in certainty in Christ is necessary because we don't want to be deceived by good-sounding, but false, arguments that oppose the knowledge of Jesus we have in the Bible.

We need to be bonded together by loving commitment to one another because we don't want to be deceived by good-sounding, but false, arguments that oppose the knowledge of Jesus we have in the Bible.

Arguments are coming. We need to be ready. Certainty about Jesus, his promises, his death, his return guard us against plausible arguments.

Illustration

Think the telemarketer won't take no for an answer so I need to hang up. I try to politely end the conversation by saying I'm not interested. I provide a plausible argument. I just refinanced a year ago. My insurance agent is a personal friend. They still won't let up. Making their case for why I need to go with what they're offering. Why won't I wilt under the plausible arguments they provide? I have complete certainty. I don't want what they're offering. So eventually hang up.

My certainty beforehand cuts off all appeal of the sale's pitch. Likewise, certainty of God's promises in Christ guards us against false teachers that offer a different way of spiritual fulfillment.

Application

A deep, rich knowledge of Christ and all the truths tied to his death, resurrection, and return, enable us to spot error when it arrives at our doorstep. If we know the truth well enough, we can detect error.

- 1) All roads leads to God → no, God's wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ and Christ alone
- 2) You don't need to be part of a church to be a faithful Christian → no, loving community in the local church is necessary for our spiritual progress

Having other Christians who are committed to me and committed to progressing in wisdom and knowledge of the truth with me, enables me to progress in maturity.

Point 5: Certainty cultivates ordered lives and firmness of faith (2:5)

For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. – 2:5

That's physically separated, but with them in his prayers and rejoicing because of the good report he's heard about. What has Paul excited is their **good order** and **firmness** of faith.

Good order

A state where things are ordered well, in an orderly manner, proper procedure.

In 1 Corinthians 14:40, the term is used for order in the church services. Services where there's peace instead of confusion.

Meaning something like well-ordered lives. Lives pressing on to maturity. Ongoing trust in Jesus and love for one another (1:4).

Firm

Being firm in one's commitment or position.

- 1) Not deluded by plausible arguments.
- 2) Not shifting from the faith (1:23).

This is what a pastor wants to see. Well-ordered lives and firmness of faith in Jesus.

Conclusion

Firmness of faith in Jesus = fully assured of what the Bible says about Jesus. Fully assured of all the promises we have in him.

- 1) Only Jesus has power over the grave.
- 2) Only Jesus can grant eternal life.
- 3) Only in Jesus is forgiveness of sins found.
- 4) Only Jesus has taken the punishment our sins deserve.
- 5) Only Jesus dwells inside his people.
- 6) Only Jesus is the head of the church.
- 7) Only Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead.
- 8) Only Jesus will restore our broken creation.
- 9) Only Jesus will abolish sin and death.

Firmness, complete certainty, comes through feeding our hearts with God's truth. Feast on God's word to strengthen your faith. Find wisdom in Jesus to order your life. Find community in the local church.