

Sleepless In Rome

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[0 : 0 0] Colossians chapter 2 then, folks, if you have your Bibles, please have them open as we work! I'll put a caveat in right at the start. I prepared this using the NIV, so there may be some areas where we just need to stop and look by considering the ESV here this evening. But let me start with a question.

What keeps you up at night? Is there something? Is there something particular? Are there different things that keep you up at night? What makes sleep elusive? I'm sure we've all had that experience in our lives where the pillow can either be a welcome friend or it can be a hot and uncomfortable foe, where it gives us no comfort and no sleep. We're anxious about the day that's gone past or the day that is to come. Perhaps we're replaying events that have already come to pass or worrying about other events that are yet to take place. Perhaps there's anger that is building against somebody, or there's a guilty conscience that's bothering us, or there's a strained relationship, or there's low mood, or for others perhaps it's excitement. It's excitement at what lies ahead. Well, I gave this sermon this evening the title, Sleepless in Rome, because that's exactly what Paul is. He may not have had trouble sleeping, but he's certainly troubled. There is something that's bothering the apostle Paul. He is greatly concerned about an issue. Now, if you look at verse 1 of Colossians 2, you can see he articulates there, for I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea, for all those who have not seen me face to face, for even people that haven't met me yet. The Greek word that's employed here is, it sounds like a Glaswegian term, *aigona*. *Aigona*. It's not a Glaswegian term. It's a Greek word, and it really means it's the root word for agony. It's where we get the word agony from. So, it means intense strain. So, Paul is under this intense strain about something. Something is bothering him. It's keeping him up at night. He's agonizing over this thing, and it's not unusual for Paul. If you know the writings of Paul, you'll remember that he's given lists in other places of the various struggles that he has had and the various suffering that he has experienced as a result of being a witness for Jesus. 2 Corinthians 11, the perils of robbers, perils upon the high seas. He's had rocks thrown at him, people trying to stone him, having to escape from places. But he ends by saying this. He says, besides everything else, I face the daily pressure of my concern for all the churches. Paul is concerned for the church of Christ. He's concerned for believers in the Lord Jesus. And as we begin Colossians chapter 2 this evening, we read of Paul's concern for the church in Colossae. Now, a couple of things just to put this into context for us this evening. Number one, Paul had never met this church. Paul did not plant this church. We can assume that it was planted by Epaphras. If you go back to chapter 1, you'll find out that he speaks of our dear fellow servant, Epaphras. We can assume that Epaphras has come to Paul, Paul who is under house arrest at the time in Rome, that such was Epaphras' concern for the well-being of the church in Colossae.

He made a 1,300-mile journey on foot to meet with the apostle Paul to relay his concerns. And out of that meeting, Paul writes to this church because what he's heard from Epaphras bothers him, that people are seeking to lead the fledgling church astray. They're seeking to place additional things into the hearts and minds of young believers there in Colossae.

And this is troubling for Paul, who desires the truth of the gospel and the wonder of Jesus to be experienced by everybody. And so because of that, Paul writes this letter to the church in Colossae.

And he wants to speak to them about the sufficiency of Jesus, the sufficiency of Jesus. And isn't that what we do at communion? We testify to the sufficiency of Jesus because none of us are sufficient and there is nothing in the world that is sufficient to declare us righteous in God's sight other than Jesus.

[4 : 41] He declares those who believe in Him righteous in the sight of God, not because we are, but because He is. And so the sufficiency of Christ is absolutely paramount. It's paramount for the lives of the believers in Colossae, and it's paramount for the lives of the believers in Carliway, or wherever you may be from. The sufficiency of Christ, His finished work, and the truth of His gospel, paramount, fundamental, absolutely essential. And that's what Paul's concern is for the church in Colossae as well. And he's concerned that there are these heretics that are coming in, and they're adding to the gospel. They're adding things that need to be done. They're adding other steps. They're adding religious ceremony, rite, or duty. Paul is saying, look, you can't be swayed by these things. And he's agonizing over them. These things are bothering him. So he's writing this letter. I think it was Mark Twain that said, a lie can make its way halfway around the world while the truth is still lacing its boots. And isn't that the truth? Falsehood can travel so quickly. Lies spread like gangrene. Gossip travels quickly. And sometimes truth is traveling at a snail's pace. But truth is truth, and right is right, regardless of what else may be happening. We're just looking at 10 verses this evening. And as I outlined the passage to look at, I thought, oh, there's six or seven points here. But I heard you got eight points last night. So I thought, well, I'll have to cut this down.

So I've got it down to three because, well, they say that every sermon should have three Ps and a poem. Well, I don't have a poem, and I don't have three Ps, but I've got three Bs. So we're going to look at them this evening very simply for us as we think about the sufficiency of Jesus and look at what Paul is exhorting the Colossian church and, by extension, the Carlyway church. Believe, behave, and beware.

Very simply, believe. I want you to know something, Paul says. You've got to know it. You've got to understand it. You've got to believe it. You've got to put all of your trust into it. But more than that, you have to behave according to it. Not just know it. Not just understand it. Not just garner knowledge. Not just amass intellectual understanding, but actually employ that. Make it, allow it to make a difference in your life and in the world around about you. Grow in your lifestyle.

Grow in your knowledge, but also employ it. May it make a manifest change in your life. And then, thirdly, beware. Be slow to entertain people's erroneous opinions about Jesus. But the only way that we can truly do that is by knowing, by believing and behaving. That will allow us to be wise and discerning. So, let's take these three this evening. Firstly, then, behave, believe. Paul's concern for the Colossian believers is that they believe the right things about Jesus. That they would have a true knowledge, a true understanding. What does it say in verse 2? He says that his goal, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ. So, Paul's first concern is that the Colossian believers would have the right knowledge and the right understanding.

Now, he speaks about their hearts there, doesn't he? That their hearts may be encouraged. When Scripture speaks of the heart, it doesn't just speak of the vital organ that is essential to earthly life. We all have a heart and it's pumping, and as long as it is, we are alive. But when we think about the heart in scriptural terms, we're thinking about something that is central to the human life, something that is central not just physically, but also in a sense spiritually as well. Often people think of the heart as kind of the seat of the emotions. And sometimes what we can do is we can separate head and heart, can't we? We say, well, it's not just about head knowledge, it's about heart knowledge.

[9 : 01] I'm sure you've probably heard that before. It's not the things that you know in your head, you've got to know them in your heart. And we often set up that kind of false dichotomy, that unhealthy paradigm of head versus heart. But in one sense, they're synonymous, aren't they?

They're the same. What does Proverbs 23 say? As a man thinks in his heart, so is he. So, it's the place where we process our thoughts. It's the seat of our will. It's the center of our emotions. It's how we understand things. So, Paul's saying, listen, Colossians, I'm really concerned that you guys have doubts in your hearts, doubts in your minds as to who Jesus really is, doubts about the sufficiency of Jesus, doubts about the finished work of Jesus. And these kind of doubts, these kind of thoughts that are being planted, sown into your minds by these false teachers, they're going to disrupt your unity. They're going to make you unsettled in your faith.

You're not going to be united in love together. It's just not going to be possible because you're going to have all these doubts, these confusing thoughts. And in this passage, there is an emphasis, you could say, on the contrast between Jesus and human philosophy. If you go down to verse 8, see to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy. Other translations have it hollow and deceptive philosophy. If we want to truly understand the gospel, if we want to really grow in our faith, then we have to recognize that there are philosophies out there that are against the truth of the Bible.

And so therefore, it's incumbent and it's essential that we understand what the gospel is and what the gospel teaches and what is true about Jesus and what is false about Jesus. These philosophies by these false teachers are often persuasive. They're often presented perhaps attractively. They're often presented in a way where we think, oh yeah, that is what I believe. But on deeper inspection, we realize, hmm, that's not actually what I believe. Paul's argument here, Paul's emphasis, Paul's concern is that the Colossian believers would understand that Jesus is, if you go and read through Colossians, that they would understand that Jesus is the creator, that Jesus is the sustainer, that Jesus is the head of the church, that Jesus is the reconciler of humanity, that he is the repository of all human wisdom and knowledge, that Jesus is the fullness of God in bodily form. So, Paul is, in no uncertain terms, setting out exactly who Jesus is as opposed to these false, hollow, and deceptive philosophies that are being promoted by the false teachers.

And what we say is, we say it with A.W. Tozer. A.W. Tozer once said, what a person believes about that person. God is the most important thing about that person.

[12 : 35] What a person believes about God is the most important thing about that person. Let me take it a step further than Tozer. What we believe about Jesus, what we understand about Jesus, what we know about Jesus is the most important thing about us. What you understand about Jesus is the most important thing about you. And let's not misunderstand. We're all theologians, right? Every single one of us is a theologian. You may say, I'm not a theologian. I haven't been to Edinburgh Theological Seminary. I haven't been to any seminary. I'm not a theologian. I'm just a regular person. We're all theologians. We all have an idea. We all have an opinion about who God is.

Whether that opinion is right or wrong depends on where we garner our information from. But we can't avoid being theologians, those who study God, because we will always ask questions, ask questions about life and the big questions of life, the philosophies of life. But the thing about knowing God, and this is what Paul's emphasis here, the more you know, the more truth that you discern, the more understanding that you have of the gospel, the more you will be able to detect wisdom, detect errors. The more wisdom you will have to discern that which is wrong, that which was erroneous, that which is damaging, that which would seek to lead you away from the truth. So, we need to believe. We need to understand. We need to know first and foremost. He says, 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 Jesus. He's seeking to encourage the Colossian believers. Here he's using military language, discipline, firm. He's speaking about steadfastness, about soldiers who are standing in formation, who are making a solid united front in battle, standing together for the truth. And the principle here is the more that we know, the more able we will be to stand firm. And that's absolutely essential when it comes to matters of faith. It's essential for a church that is robust and that is strong and that is resilient and that is steadfast.

That is absolutely essential individually, but also corporately as the body of Christ. James Montgomery Boyce said this, we do not have a strong church today, nor do we have many strong Christians. We can trace the cause to an acute lack of sound spiritual knowledge. Why is the church weak?

Why are individual Christians weak? It's because they have allowed their minds to become conformed to the spirit of this age with its mechanistic godless thinking. They have forgotten what God is like and what he promises to do for those who trust him. Ask an average Christian to talk about God and after getting past the expected answers, you will find that his God is a little God of facilitating sentiment. Harsh words, really. But is there an element of truth to that? Without knowledge, the prophet says, the people perish. We need knowledge. That's why week in, week out, Thomas or Gordon, whoever's preaching here, it's Bible exposition. Well, I hope it is. I'm sure it is.

That's why we do biblical exposition. That's why we preach through books of the Bible. That's why we go through specific biblical themes because we want people to be satisfied in their souls, but also prepared, also informed, knowledgeable about the faith that we own. Because deception is part of the last days. The one who is the deceiver will seek to deceive us. He is the father of lies after all.

[16 : 35] What did Paul write elsewhere to Timothy? For the time will come where people will not put up with sound doctrine. Are we there? Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. You want to know the truth? Come to Jesus. You want to rest in the truth?

Turn to God's revelation of himself in Scripture. The truth is, in the world in which we live today, if people were to say, well, you know, we're going to remove some of the teaching element from church and we're going to increase the sort of musical element, the majority of people would shrug their shoulders and say, okay. Even if exposition sounds solid, solid exposition is taken away and that kind of moralistic mumbo-jumbo of be kind and be nice is promoted, people don't really blink an eye. What did Jeremiah 5 say? God says to the prophet, a horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land. The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end? What we believe is of utmost importance. How do we believe? Through knowledge. How do we come to know that knowledge?

How does faith come? It comes by hearing, doesn't it? And hearing what? The Word of God. Where do we find this knowledge? In the Word of God. What is truth? God's Word is truth. Your Word is truth.

This is what kept Paul up at night, his desire that people would believe, that they would know, that they would understand. Because he could see that there would be a slide away into vacuous, empty, false teaching. There's a very real possibility for the Colossians, but also for everyone else, for all of us. So we have to be discerning. How do we discern? Well, we grow in knowledge. We study. We apply ourselves. So Paul says, listen, I want you to know. I want you to understand. I want you to believe the truth about Jesus. Believe. Lean all your weight into your believing in Jesus. Secondly, he says, it's not just about believing, but it's also about behaving.

Don't just believe, but also behave. Let your activity catch up with your minds. It's one thing to amass all this knowledge, to have all this theoretical, academic, intelligent understanding.

[19 : 19] But if it's merely an academic exercise, what use is that? What good does it do? Verse 6, so then, just as you received Christ, therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. If you're here this evening and you have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, and I pray that that is all of us, then we are saved by the grace of God in and through Christ Jesus, and that's a great place to be. Hallelujah. Paul's first concern is that they know. Paul's second concern is that they grow. Thomas's first concern is that you know through teaching. His second concern here is that you would grow. You would grow in your knowledge and understanding, that you would know the truth, but that you would grow in the truth and your trust of that truth. The Greek word that Paul uses here is *peripetete*. It's the word to walk. It's synonymous with live your life.

The NIV renders it that way. It renders live your life, or the ESV uses walk with the Lord, but we get the idea. It's about how we live. It's about the behavior that we adopt. It's our lifestyle.

It's our consistency. It's the things that we choose to do. It's the places that we choose to place ourselves. It's the activities that we fill our time with. We are to walk with the Lord. He used it already in verse 10 of chapter 1. He uses it in chapter 3. He uses it in chapter 4.

He uses it in chapter 5. And he's saying, look, there's more than mere knowledge to the Christian faith. Knowledge is absolutely, fundamentally essential so that you may be discerning and that you may know what's true and what's not. But it has to be more than that. It has to translate into what you do and how you do it. Now, the idea for walking with the Lord, rooted and built up in Him, is simply continuing to believe the truth, continue to search the truth and seek the truth and study the truth, to not stop believing the truth about Jesus, to let Jesus into every aspect of our lives. The Christian faith is not a compartmentalized faith. The Christian faith is not something that we box up neatly and we say, that's Sunday on the shelf there, keep that there, and then we'll just continue our lives as we please elsewhere. No, Jesus permeates our lives, should be in every aspect of our lives, every arena of our lives, every activity of our lives.

It should be shaped by who we are in Christ, what we have learned in Jesus. And verses 6 and 7 really tell us that, tell us how we're to walk with Jesus, how to have a healthy walk.

[22 : 30] Let me give you another couple. In order to have a healthy walk with Jesus, we have to keep moving forward so that we don't slip backwards. Fairly simple. In order to have a healthy walk with Jesus, we must keep moving forwards so that we don't slip backwards. So then, just as you received Jesus as Lord, so walk with Him rooted and built up in Him. Just as you received, so it's past tense here, isn't it? In other words, Paul is saying, once you receive Jesus, that's awesome. That is great news.

We're glad, we're delighted that you've been saved in whatever way the Lord met you and saved you and drew you to Himself. But now walk with Him. Continue with Him. Walk in Him. Don't stop. Keep moving forward so that you don't slip backwards. Spurgeon put it much better than I can. He said, the Christian life is like climbing a hill of ice. You can't slide up. Quite picturesque, isn't it?

The Christian life is like climbing a hill of ice. You can't slide up, but you can slide backwards. And you can do so very easily when you stop moving forwards. We never hear of people upsliding, do we?

We hear people backsliding, sliding downward. So we have to continue pushing forwards, striving to that which is ahead. Number two, we should grow down so that we can grow up. Sounds counterintuitive, doesn't it? But think of a tree. It puts its root system down deep into the ground. I've even seen a small tree with, you know, a big 13-ton track machine trying to pull it, and it's pulling the digger off the ground because its root system is so extensive that it is absolutely steadfastly immovable even against the power of a machine like that. This is all under the banner of behave, but you grow down in order that you would be rooted, he says. Rooted and built up. You have to be rooted in order to grow up. If you're building a house and you don't put a foundation in, what's going to happen?

The likelihood is it'll fall down. If you've got a big skyscraper, what you'll find is that there's a lot of foundation down under the ground in order that that building may retain its structural integrity. So we have to grow down and then grow up, rooted and built up. So it's growing down in order that we might grow up. So we go for depth, not for breadth. Get a root system. Go down. Go deep into the Word. Root yourself. Mine the truth. Search the riches, the unsearchable riches of Jesus in His Word in order that you may flourish, that you might grow, that you may bear fruit and fruit that will last. A tree must grow down before it grows up. Good fruit depends on a good root, you might say. A fruitful Christian has roots, and where are those roots? In God's Word. Just as you have received Christ, it doesn't move on from Him. We stay with Jesus. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Stay connected to Him. I am the vine, you are the branches. Aside from me, you can do? Nothing. Just checking it awake.

[25 : 55] So keep moving forward so you don't slip backwards. Grow down in order that you can grow up. And then thirdly, thinking should lead to thanking. Thinking should lead to thanking. It's straightforward, isn't it? After all this great theology, after all the truth of the gospel, after growing down and beginning to grow up, we should be thankful, we should be rejoicing, we should be indeed abounding or overflowing with thankfulness as other translations have it. That's the effect of good theology.

The effect of good theology is not a miserable, morose countenance, a faith that is dreary and boring. The effect of good theology is abounding thankfulness. It's joy. If we're down in the mouth and pessimistic always, there's something that we're missing about the Lord and about the gospel, about Jesus. There's something lacking in our theology because the mark of a healthy believer, the mark of a healthy, mature Christian is a gratitude that spills out, that is abundant, that's overflowing in our lives.

That's how the apostle Paul, even whilst incarcerated, even whilst in chains, can say in everything, give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Whatever may happen, you may not give thanks for thanks for that thing, but you can give thanks in that thing because you know the Lord.

And whatever temporal difficulties we might experience here and now are not worth comparing with a crown of glory that awaits those who believe in Him. So we're to believe in Jesus, know Him, understand Him, grow in Him, discern Him, be wise in Him. And if we do that, it should spill over into how we live, how we walk, looking back to who we have become in Christ, what has been done for us, and how that transforms the way in which we live. And our final word this evening is beware.

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

[28 : 24] For in Him, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority. Philosophy here comes from two Greek words, *phileto*, which means love, and *sophia*, which means wisdom or the right application of knowledge.

And so it simply means somebody who loves to pursue knowledge or wisdom. Philosophy is what it is. And in one sense, we're all a philosopher, just like we're all a theologian, because we all grapple with big questions in life. Why am I here? Who am I? What's the purpose of my life? Et cetera. But when Paul here uses the word philosophy, he's not talking about the philosophy of loving wisdom and loving knowledge and pursuing the things that are good. He's using philosophy in the terms he uses the word hollow or empty here. And he's meaning intellectual research that is driven by a man-centered goal. So man's attempt, mankind's attempt to find out by his own intellect and his own research things which can only be known through divine revelation. It's man's attempt to find out through his own intellect and research those things that can only be known by divine revelation.

And there's this group of heretics that are infiltrating the church in Colossae, and that's what they're doing. It became known as the Colossae heresy, eventually became Gnosticism, and it's about this special knowledge, and talked about, you know, Jesus not having a physical form because anything physical was evil, and we'll not go into the Gnostic heresy right now. But what Paul is saying here is saying, look, there are people that will come to you, and they'll say that they are speaking the truth. They will use the same vocabulary as you, but they have a different dictionary.

That's probably the best way to describe it. They'll use the same vocabulary, but they'll have a different dictionary. It will mean something very different to what is actually the truth.

This has happened numerous times down through history, where something is presented, but it's not actually good. It's not actually true. Pepsi, Pepsi Cola had a marketing campaign back between 1963 and 1967 that used the slogan, come alive, and you think, yeah, great. Oh, there it is. Come alive.

[31 : 02] You're the Pepsi generation. However, when they rolled this advertising campaign out in China and took the direct slogan into Chinese, it meant Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave.

Not quite what they were hoping for. Or Parker Pens made a hilarious blunder when they were translating some advertising slogan into Spanish. So the advertising slogan for the pen was, it won't leak in your pocket and embarrass you. But when they translated it into Spanish without realizing it became, it won't leak in your pocket and make you pregnant. Again, not quite what they were hoping for. Or Ford, Ford Motor Company, they had a message which said, every car has a high quality body. But when they translated it into use in Belgium, the advert became, every car has a high quality corpse. Not quite the additional extra or optional extra that you'd want with your new car.

There was a US food company called Gerber Baby Food. And when they started entering into the African market, they failed to see a big flaw in their product. So rather than having writing on the front of their baby food jars, they just had pictures of babies. Now to the African people, what they thought was in the jar was a baby. And so that really was not what this company were trying to put across. Now these are innocent mistakes. No babies in jars, no ancestors that come back from the grave when you crack open a can of Pepsi. There's nobody in your boot when you buy a new Ford. But the point is, heretics' words are like putting the wrong labels on jars, putting the wrong words in adverts. Same vocabulary, different dictionary. Wrong information. Cults are notorious for doing that. That's why people get confused. You know, somebody comes and knocks at your door, Jehovah's Witness, for example, and they'll say, oh, we love Jesus too. And we're born again too. But dig down a wee bit deeper, and you'll find that they don't love the Jesus that we love, and they don't believe in the Jesus that we believe in. So we're to beware, says Paul. Beware, take heed, see to it. Therefore, as you see to it that nobody takes you captive, beware, take heed. Don't be led astray by hollow philosophy. A better translation here is don't let anyone kidnap your faith. Don't let anyone kidnap your faith. They're heretics, and they're nothing more than spiritual human traffickers. They're kidnapping your faith. Know the truth. Cling to the truth. Cleave to the truth. Because, well, Acts 29.

Acts 20, 29. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number, men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw people away after them.

But what does he follow this up with, just as we close? Verse 9, perhaps the clearest verse affirming the deity of Jesus in all of Scripture. For in him, in Christ, the whole fullness of deity dwells. For in Christ, the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. He uses the word *pleroma*.

[34 : 45] This is a word of fullness. The fullness of Jesus. There is nothing that is required to be added. He is sufficient. Jesus didn't get part of it like these heretics were saying when you needed extra.

Jesus is all of it. He embodies all of it. He is the fullness of God in bodily form. He is the one who completes us. The Gnostics would say you're not complete in Jesus. Jesus is a good start. He's a good place to start, but you need more than Jesus. You need a deeper knowledge. You need a special knowledge. You need these extra things. Paul's saying, hang on a minute. Absolutely not. Jesus is totally sufficient. Jesus is the fullness of God in bodily form, and in him you have been filled.

You have been filled. He is the one who is the head. He is the one. Paul is concerned that the Christians in Colossae who were complete in Jesus were beginning to think they were incomplete because of the false teachers, and he was also concerned that the unbelievers were incomplete because they were unbelievers, and that's the truth, isn't it? We are all incomplete aside from Jesus. Without Christ this evening, you are incomplete, and that should certainly keep you up at night. But he stands, and he waits, and he is the fullness, and he longs to complete you, and in him you will find truth, and he longs that we might believe, and that by believing we might behave, and that by believing and behaving we will be able to discern and beware. Jesus is sufficient, sufficient for the

Colossians, and sufficient for the Carlotidians. Let's pray.