

# Fighting for Spiritual Maturity

Colossians 2:1-5

4 August 2019 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

**Big Question:** Why is spiritual maturity worth fighting for?

**Big Idea:** Gospel maturity fosters spiritual security.

## Introduction

When we were on holidays recently, we met up with someone who lives in a regional Queensland town.

She shares a house with a number of other young professionals – many of whom work shifts – and so are always coming and going.

When one of their housemates moved out, a couple of months later they realised that they'd better find out what happened to the house keys.

Not HER house keys, but THE house keys.

There's only one set and no one knew where they were because the house never gets locked.

Growing up, a friend of mine wasn't a latch-key kid because he didn't have a key.

His family didn't even know where the keys to their house were.

They'd lost them years ago because they never got used.

I'm also reminded of a family I once stayed with in Far North Queensland – home of poisonous snakes and killer birds – whose house didn't even have any doors.

There wasn't a single door in entire house, except for the bathrooms.

There was just some rope around the outside to stop the horses from wandering in... most of the time.

Living in the city, most of us take security a little bit more seriously.

If you're part of the community groups for this area on Facebook, you'll see that there's often break-ins in this area.

People leave their cars only to come back the next morning and find that everything that's valuable has been taken.

Now I bet I've got some of you wondering whether you did actually lock the door and secure the windows on your way out this morning.

Most of us know why our physical security matters.

We lock the doors, put *Crimsafe* on the windows and close the garage door to stop stuff being stolen.

But what about our spiritual security?

How do we foster spiritual security?

That seems much harder, perhaps even impossible.

## Outline

We're studying a letter that was written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Colossae.

We believe that the One, True God has revealed himself to us in the Bible.

This letter has been passed down for us through the centuries and is part of the Bible we call the New Testament.

The reason we're studying it is so that we can learn as he speaks to us today through the words that Paul wrote to the Colossians long ago.

Last week, we saw that Paul was in the business of proclaiming Christ.

His desire was that everyone would be fully mature with him, verse 28.

And so he poured his heart and soul into proclaiming Christ with every ounce of energy the Lord provided.

But why?

Why did he want the Colossians to be grow to maturity?

He was working so they'd mature and have spiritual security.

### **Gospel maturity fosters spiritual security.**

Paul is labouring for their maturity, because that'll give spiritual security.

Paul drills down into the significance everything he's been saying has for the Colossians.

- Spiritual Maturity is Worth Fighting For (vv1-2a)
- Spiritual Maturity Comes from the Assurance of Knowing Christ (vv2b-3)
- Spiritual Maturity Means We Stand Firm (vv4-5)

## Spiritual Maturity is Worth Fighting For (vv1-2a)

How would you feel if someone wrote these words to you?

Verse 1:

*Colossians 2:1 (NIV11) <sup>1</sup> I want you to know how hard I am contending for you*

Other translations use the word “suffering”. That’s a strong word, isn’t it?

Paul wants the Colossians to know just how much he’s labouring for them, how much he’s suffering for them.

How would that make you feel?

He really doesn’t sound very humble, does he?

It sounds like he’s saying, “I’m writing to you so that you can be impressed and amazed by my efforts.”

No. We know that’s not the reason he’s writing to them at all.

He’s not writing so they’ll be impressed because he tells us that his goal is that they’d be “encouraged in heart”, verse 2.

That they’d be comforted and strengthened in the gospel.

The first sign of being mature is having a heart that’s encouraged.

We often think that encouragement is the fuel that causes people to keep pressing on.

And that’s true, but it’s also a sign of maturity.

If you’re someone who’s encouraged, then you’re on an even keel, pressing on in the Lord.

Being encouraged in your heart doesn’t just mean that you feel good and have a positive outlook on life.

It’s more than that.

It’s being encouraged in the whole way that you’re going.

He wants them to know that they’re thinking the right way too.

That doesn’t just happen. It takes hard work. It needs to be fought for.

The struggle is real for Paul.

It’s not so much that he’s suffering in gaol, although that’s true, but that he’s fighting for them.

He’s in their corner.

He’s not just working for them, he’s in a battle on their behalf.

We’ve seen what that looks like in this letter already.

First of all, he’s taken the effort to write to them.

Today, we send people a text to let them know that we're concerned for them or thinking of them.

In the ancient world, sending a letter was a big deal.

How much more must he have been concerned with the Colossians to go to that effort.

He also prays for them thoughtfully.

We saw that in chapter 1.

What was the purpose of telling them that he what he was praying for them?

It was so that they'd be encouraged, wasn't it?

That's a great model for us.

When you're praying for someone, don't just tell them that you're praying for them.

Tell them what you're praying for them as well.

It's encouraging to know that people are praying for you, but it's even more encouraging to know that they're praying thoughtfully and meaningfully for you.

And apart from anything else, it tells you that they probably really are praying for you rather than just saying it as a throw-away line.

I reckon that would've been a great encouragement to receive a letter and know that Paul was praying for them.

That alone would've helped make them feel more secure in their faith.

To know that someone else fighting for them would've been encouraging.

Do you have someone who's fighting for your maturity?

Are there people praying for you on a daily basis? What a great blessing if there are!

Do you know that there are people who are watching your life and doctrine closely.

If you do, you can press on with confidence, knowing that you're headed in the right direction.

Do you have people who write and encourage you to press on?

We all need people around us who are watching that we don't veer off course.

Not only does Paul want them to be encouraged though, he also wants them to be united in love, again in verse 2.

He wants the Christians in Colossae to be working to the same end, fighting on the same team.

Unity comes from love.

Caring for each other and putting the needs of others ahead of our own.

Without love, you can only put aside your differences for so long before the cracks start to show.

Yet why is it that so often it can feel like Christians are bent on tearing each other apart.

It's as if they are standing in a circle shooting each other.

People can now have massive barneys instantly and for the whole world to see.

Even amongst prominent Christians on Twitter, you watch on and wonder why, when they agree about 99.9% of the same things, they have to fight over the 0.1% as if it's a hill to die on.

Churches usually fall-out over the smallest things.

And it's because they're treated as the main thing.

Churches have split over whether you should baptise people forwards or backwards.

Can that really happen when we love one another though?

Too often, our disagreements aren't really a fight for truth so much as a fight of pride.

When the Scriptures just aren't that clear, we're always going to have differences.

If you're looking for a church that agrees exactly with you, you're going to be in a church of one.

Or in my case, a church of none because I often find that I disagree with myself.

Maturity is knowing what differences to put aside and which are the hills worth dying on because it's not everything.

Unity necessarily means compromising on something.

And love is what allows us to do this.

It's love that causes us to embrace our brothers and sisters even when we disagree on things that aren't central.

Paul expands on this in chapter 3 where he calls the church to bear with one another and practice forgiveness.

He explains that love is what binds us together in unity:

*Colossians 3:13–14 (NIV11) <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

A church that's encouraged in heart and united in love is worth fighting for.

It's not just Paul who's struggling for them to this end.

In the last chapter of the letter, we find that there are others, like Epaphras, who are fighting for the Colossians' maturity as well.

Paul wants them to know he's still working hard for them too.

*Colossians 4:12–13 (NIV11) <sup>12</sup> Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. <sup>13</sup> I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.*

Epaphras wrestles in prayer for them, wanting them to stand strong and mature.

And Paul doesn't just have this goal for the Colossians.

It's also his desire for all the Christians in the church a little bit down the valley at Laodicea as well (in chapter 4 they're told to swap letters with each other).

And his hope goes well beyond them – that's his hope for every Christian.

The same hope he has even for those that he hasn't met in the flesh.

Is that your hope for your brothers and sisters?

Is that your goal for others here? That they would grow in maturity.

Often, we struggle to be motivated to fight for ourselves.

Or we're motivated to fight for our family but that's about it.

But what about complete strangers?

Paul was willing to fight for their spiritual vitality and security.

Even those he hadn't met because spiritual maturity is worth fighting for.

## **Spiritual Maturity Comes from the Assurance of Knowing Christ (vv2b-3)**

He also wants the Colossians to have the security that comes from knowing Christ.

Spiritual maturity comes from knowing Jesus.

It's pretty clear in this letter that there were at least some people who felt tempted to want more than Jesus.

People are wired differently.

Some people want a more spiritual experience.

That's why things like the *The Secret* were so popular in the mid-2000s.

It was all about ask, believe, receive.

They even tried to base it on Matthew 21:22 but the aim was to feel good and change your life.

The law of attraction – which isn't new at all – says that thoughts can change a person directly.

Once you have that knowledge, all you need to do is ask, believe, receive.

Some people want the rational experience – they want everything explained clearly and precisely.

They want to know all the ins and outs and they want to see for themselves.

And so they demand proof.

Anything less than seeing with their own eyes won't do.

Paul says that maturity comes from understanding.

But understanding doesn't come from seeing proof with your own eyes.

Nor does it come from feelings which come and go.

He wants them to have the richness of complete understanding.

That comes through knowing the mystery of God – which is Christ.

By knowing Christ, they're going to have the full riches of assurance of understanding.

If you want proof, then you need to look at Jesus.

Knowing Christ brings spiritual security.

I think Paul begins a new idea in the second half of verse 2.

He wants them to have the assurance that comes from knowing Jesus.

Why? Because all wisdom and knowledge are found in him, verse 3.

Wisdom and knowledge are important.

Do you remember Paul's prayer from chapter one?

He prayed that the Colossians would have exactly these two things.

*Colossians 1:9b–10 (NIV11) We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, <sup>10</sup> so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,*

Jews thought they had all wisdom and knowledge in the Law.

The wisdom books like Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes give us lots of wisdom.

Others said that spiritual maturity can only be discovered by only a few.

But in Christ, all of God's wisdom and knowledge are displayed.

*Hebrews 1:1–2 (NIV11) <sup>1</sup> In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.*

In Christ can be found all wisdom and knowledge.

Not many of us get excited about reading all the legal jargon in the fine print.

Isn't it great to know that there isn't any fine print?

If you know Jesus, then you can find everything that there is to be found.

How much do you value wisdom?

The world is changing around us and we're told that a large percentage of jobs in the future aren't even around today.

How much are you influenced by the "don't read the manual", "I'll be the CEO by lunchtime" mentality?

In times past, the wisdom and knowledge that come from doing a job for a long time were valued.

Now, someone who's done the same job for a long time is considered to be a dinosaur.

We think we don't need wisdom – we can Google that.

We don't even need knowledge – there's a YouTube video for that.

All we need is the skills to be able to access all the wisdom and knowledge we need, when we need it.

And this's the problem.

There's not always time to Google and do research – we need this stuff embedded in us.



We need wisdom outside of ourselves.

We're limited by our own human ability and even with our knowledge combined, we still don't fully understand the world.

And as wise as Google is and as knowledgeable as you can get from YouTube, neither of them are a patch on God.

They don't know nearly as much as the one who put it together.

Unlike a search engine, Jesus never gets the world wrong.

Wisdom is understanding reality from God's perspective and that needs to come from outside of the info that people put in.

To know the mystery of Christ is to know God.

He's the personification of all wisdom and knowledge.

There's nothing more to know.

In him are all these treasures – that's why we need to remain focused on Christ.

Anyone who knows Christ can draw on this wisdom and knowledge.

Spiritual maturity and spiritual security come from knowing Christ.

What are you looking to for to find security?

Do you trust in your family?

Do you trust in your family background?

Do you trust in the fact that you come to church?

Do you trust in your good works?

What makes you spiritually secure?

Only trusting in Christ will do.

The Cross looked like foolishness to many.

Why would God allow his Son to die?

Because it was actually an absolute stroke of genius.

It was only by Jesus dying for us that we could be saved.

Only by Christ taking the punishment we deserve could our sins be forgiven.

The holy God paid for our sins, freeing us from all fear and condemnation if we place our trust in him.

If we know Christ and what he's done, we've seen God's wisdom displayed.

That's when we can be assured that we're right with God.

## **Spiritual Maturity Means We Stand Firm (vv4-5)**

Finally, Paul's writing so that they'd stand firm.

He doesn't want anyone to be trapped by fine-sounding arguments.

He doesn't want them to be deceived.

Most of us aren't caught out by really outrageous claims.

You get an email from a Nigerian Prince who needs to move \$8 million out of the country in a hurry telling you that he's chosen you to help.

Most of us immediately recognise it for what it is – a scam – and promptly put it in the trash.

However, there are clearly enough people who are desperate enough to fall for it that they keep on doing it.

Before we get too carried away patting ourselves on the back for being scam-savvy, don't forget that's just a really obvious one.

I saw a scam this week that was much more sophisticated.

Forget phone or email though, they've gone back to snail mail.

The letter from Telstra threatened that their account would be cancelled if they didn't ring and confirm their personal details.

Here are two envelopes from Telstra – one real and one fake.

Can you tell the difference between the real one and the fake?

The most successful lies are the ones that're closest to the truth.

I know of Christians who even after they've been scammed for significant amounts of money, still don't believe that it was actually a scam even when a pastor tells them.

That's a money scam.

How much more do we need to be careful of spiritual scammers?

The spiritual scams that're hardest to detect are the ones that sound the most plausible.

The more realistic the false teaching is, the better it works.

Plato talks about the danger of listening to fine arguments that have no proof.

Be careful of hot air that doesn't match up with the Bible.

They're the ones that you've got to really be careful of.

Are you someone who's deceived?

Hopefully you're not.

If you are, I pray that God would open your spiritual eyes to Christ.

That you would see that he's the answer you're looking for.

If you're already a Christian, then don't move from the security of maturity in the gospel.

Spiritual maturity means we stand firm in the gospel truths.

That's why Paul writes, verse 4:

*Colossians 2:4 (NIV11) <sup>4</sup>I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.*

Even though Paul's unable to be with them physically, he's still connected to them as we'll see in verse five.

Just because he's not around doesn't mean that he's abandoned them.

He hasn't met many of them face-to-face, verse 1.

But he hasn't abandoned them and he hasn't forgotten them.

Although he's unable to be with them personally (he was a little tied up), he's still working for them.

The Christian faith is a team sport.

There's no lone rangers here.

But distance doesn't stop us helping each other.

Paul's still fighting for the so that they'd stand firm.

My inbox is full of missionary prayer updates.

There are some that I read more than others and take a greater interest in than others.

Some of them I know really well and follow their journey closely and I pray for them regularly.

We're partners in the gospel, even though we haven't met.

That's what it's like for Paul.

He's absent in the body, but present in spirit.

He cares about these people.

Even though he hasn't met them, he makes sure that he gets reports about them.

Paul received information from Epaphras.

And he's doing his best to send Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.

He's sending the slave Onesimus back.

Tychicus will tell them the news when he comes.

Paul delights in how well they're doing.

So what are the Colossians like?

They're secure at the moment.

They're disciplined. They're orderly.

This is a military term... they're not all over the place.

They're firm in their faith.

The church isn't already infected, but it needs to be resisted in the future.

That's why they need to continue to grow in maturity – to maintain that security.

Maturity helps us stand firm.

## Conclusion

Take a spiritual pulse-check today.

How secure is your faith?

How firmly grounded in Christ are you?

If you're mature in Christ, then you will stand firm.

You'll be grounded on Christ.

And that's worth fighting for.

Maybe you're not mature in Jesus at all.

Perhaps today's even the day to start trusting him.

I pray that this would be the beginning of you growing in spiritual maturity.

Because gospel maturity fosters spiritual security.

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**Big Question:** Why is spiritual maturity worth fighting for?

**Big Idea:** Gospel maturity fosters spiritual security.

## Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the condition of the church in Colossae?
2. Why does Paul want them to know that he's contending for them?
3. As a Christian, do you feel any need to fight for the spiritual maturity of others?
4. Why is being 'united in love' a sign of Christian maturity?
5. Do we really need Jesus to have wisdom and knowledge?
6. In what ways does knowing Christ give us spiritual security?
7. Why is Paul particularly concerned about "fine-sounding arguments"?
8. Do you have to be physically present with someone to minister to them? If not, how can you minister to others from afar?