



“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

Divine Discernment

Central Truth: Divine knowledge enables the believer to distinguish between true and false doctrine.

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Topic: Christ: Nature of; Christmas; Knowledge: Of Christ.

The keystone of the Christian faith is the doctrine of Christ. Is Jesus of Nazareth the Christ (Messiah) of God? Is He very God of very God or merely a person who represents God? The Christian believes that God was personally present in human flesh in the person we call Jesus of Nazareth, that Jesus is one with God now and forever, and that Jesus paid the sin debt for poor fallen sinners by His death and resurrection.

The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians was written to support that doctrine and to contradict a false doctrine which denied it. A heresy had grown up in Colosse, and it had challenged the Christian doctrine of Christ. It held that the perfectly holy God could not come in contact with sinful man without destroying him in divine justice. Yet, God wanted to redeem fallen man. So He sent forth a series of angelic beings (called emanations) which formed a line between God and man. Those closest to God were most like God, and those closest to man in the line were most like man. If that was so, Jesus would be at the bottom of the line because He came in human flesh. He would be like God, therefore, but not absolute deity. Paul's response was, *“In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”* (Colossians 2:9).

This is our “Christmas lesson” this year. It is a study of the importance of knowing and understanding the doctrine of Christ. Divine knowledge enables the believer to distinguish between true and false doctrine. Therefore, *“giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue*

knowledge” (II Peter 1:5).

I. THE NEED OF KNOWLEDGE (Colossians 2:1, 2)

Error in the doctrine of Christ will put one outside the Christian faith. Therefore, Paul had a great anxiety and was making a strenuous effort to “head off the heresy at Colosse, Laodicea, and the rest of the region of eastern Asia. His concern was that their hearts (minds, emotions, and wills) might be strengthened in the truth.

He wrote the epistle to the Colossians to make them certain in their knowledge and assured in their beliefs. Obtaining the knowledge of Jesus is like coming into possession of great wealth. It would be a shame to miss the full blessedness which a conviction of the truth in Jesus brings.

The knowledge needed by each Christian is called a “*mystery*” in the King James Version of the New Testament. That does not mean something so hidden or complicated that only a few can understand it. It rather means something that has been hidden to generations past but is now clear in the Christian revelation. God's secret plan, now made known to Christians, is the person of Christ himself.

Who would have thought that the God of the universe would confine himself in the body of a helpless infant born to a virgin girl? Who would have thought that one who saw the Son of the virgin would be seeing God himself shrouded in human flesh? Who would have thought that an understanding of all the ways and purposes of God would be His? Who would have thought that to believe in Him would bring forgiveness of all sins, make one a child of God who bears the very nature of God, and give one eternal life?

No wonder the Bible calls it a mystery. The greatest saints of previous generations had never conceived of such a thing. It is common knowledge now, believed by every true Christian. Here is “*the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: . . . which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:26, 27). Aren't you glad you have that knowledge?

II: THE SUBJECT OF KNOWLEDGE (Colossians 2:2, 3)

Christian knowledge includes historical facts, for the work of Christ was done at a point in human history which can be identified with specific dates. It includes doctrinal precepts, also, for the truths concerning the person and work of Jesus are the foundation of the faith. But Christian

knowledge includes much more than historical facts and doctrinal precepts. It is essentially and ultimately the knowledge of a person, the person of the true God. It is *“the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ”* (verse 2).

God was called Father in the Old Testament before Jesus came. But Jesus emphasized the personal relationship between God and a believer. He spoke of *“my Father, and your Father; and . . . my God and your God”* (John 20:17). God is more than the Father of all mankind, or a chosen nation, or Christian believers. He is a personal Father to each one who trusts Jesus. Praise His name!

Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. God is made manifest in terms we humans can understand in the person and work of Jesus. Jesus said, *“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father”* (John 14:9). He is so related to the Father that no one can come to God except through Jesus. To be a Christian is more than to know doctrine or to adopt a philosophy of life or to live by a certain ethic. It is to know God personally by faith in Jesus.

Jesus promised that when He returned to heaven He would request the Father and the Holy Spirit would be sent to indwell each believer personally and permanently (John 14:16-26). It happened just as He said. The Holy Spirit is in the world today to convince sinners of their need and to call them to Christ. When one has responded in repentance and faith, the Holy Spirit lives in him to teach him the things of Christ (John 16:7-15).

Christian knowledge involves a personal acquaintance with all three persons of Holy Trinity — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

But that knowledge is subject to pollution by the world. Therefore, the Christian must know the truth so that he may distinguish between truth and error. Thereby he can keep pure the precious doctrines of Christ and not be led astray by the false doctrines of mankind.

III. THE CHALLENGE OF KNOWLEDGE (Colossians 2:4, 5, 8)

It is possible that someone might *“beguile you with enticing words”* and *“spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ”* (verses 4, 5, 8). Beware!

Full Christian knowledge will protect the believer against such deception. Some are misled and deceived by persuasive speakers who use high-flown speech to present their erroneous doctrines. Their arguments may sound very logical, but one with an understanding of the doctrines of Christ will see through them and recognize them as heresy.

It behooves the Christian to remain steadfast in his loyalty to Christ. Christians must present an unbroken front of loyalty to the faith because of their knowledge of Christ. They encourage others by their steadfastness of faith in Christ.

IV. THE BENEFITS OF KNOWLEDGE (Colossians 2:6, 7)

Knowledge of spiritual truth enables us to receive Christ. We will not call on Him in whom we have not believed, or believe in Him of whom we have not heard (Romans 10: 14). A Christian witness always begins with a testimony of the facts that God has revealed in Jesus.

Knowledge of spiritual truth enables us to live for Christ. How can one know the spiritual resources of strength, prayer, and encouragement that God has provided unless he has been taught of them? Christian knowledge is the foundation for a Christian lifestyle.

Knowledge of spiritual truth enables us to abide in Christ. We draw our nourishment from Him as the roots draw nourishment from the soil to support a plant. We are built up in Him as a building is erected while it rests securely on its foundation. We overflow with gratitude toward Him as He supplies all of our needs. He is himself the key to all spiritual life.

Christian knowledge enables us to abound in Christ, to overflow in His provisions. The apostle Paul wrote of God always enabling “*us to triumph in Christ*” (II Corinthians 2:14). “From victory unto victory,/His army shall he lead,/Till every foe is vanquished,/And Christ is Lord indeed” (George Duffield, Jr.). That is normal Christian living.

Knowing facts alone will not produce such a lifestyle, of course. But living according to the truths God has revealed in Christ Jesus will make it possible. Devote your best efforts to learning all you can of your Lord. The rewards are far beyond the effort involved.

V. THE MYSTERY OF KNOWLEDGE (Colossians 2:9)

Colossians 2:9, 10 makes one of the most astounding statements in all Christian revelation. It tells us that the fullness (the absolute totality) of deity dwelt permanently in Jesus of Nazareth, even while He was here living as Man among men. It tells us further that every person who is in Christ is complete in His fullness. Astounding, isn't it? Understand that truth and live in the light of it.

Distinguish between divinity (being like God) and deity (being very God of very God). Jesus was not merely divine. If so, He would have been

like God as a son who favors his father is said to be like him. Jesus was very God in whom the absolute totality of essential deity resided; He is still Deity. Do not think of Him as being one-third God as one person of the Trinity. To see Him is to see the Father. To receive Him is to receive the Father and the Holy Spirit. No one expected God himself to come in all His fullness, but He did in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Believe it and rejoice in it.

Think of the consequences of that truth as applied to you. "*Ye are complete in him*" (verse 10). You are filled with God because of your union with Christ! As an empty sinner, you were placed in the full Savior at your conversion. His fullness filled you. You now have God himself living in you. You have been filled full and continue in a state of fullness. Believe it and rejoice!

Jesus is more than a babe in the manger or a victim on a cross. He is God himself in human flesh, restoring the divine nature to those who trust Him. That is what Christmas is really all about.

Questions for discussion

1. What difference does this study make in the way you observe Christmas?
2. How can you change your observance to make Christmas a truly Christian observance?
3. How can you show family and friends the true meaning of Christmas?
4. How does this study magnify the person of Christ to you?
5. In what way is this a "mystery"?
6. What is the difference between knowing Christ and knowing about Christ?
7. What are the enemies of spiritual knowledge?
8. How are you benefited by an increasing knowledge of Christ?
9. How does all of God dwell in Jesus?
10. What lifestyle will show that you are complete in Him?