

Sermon or Lesson: Colossians 2:2-3 (NIV based)
[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: Actively Facilitating New Believers And Immature Believers Towards Spiritual Maturity

INTRODUCTION: What is the actual philosophy of ministry that is being implemented by this church, and not what does it say its philosophy of ministry is in its mission statement? Does the actual philosophy of ministry of this church fully align with what God instructs? Or instead, in actuality does this church try to fulfill only a few basic parts of all that God wants it to do? Let's dig into our verses of study in Colossians to discover some more aspects of what God wants churches to do.

READ: Colossians 2:2-3, with vv.1:28-2:1 and v.2:4-7 for context

BACKGROUND:

- - Jesus is Jehovah God Himself, in fullness and in physical bodily form, which qualifies Him to "redeem" or buy "the forgiveness of sins" for humans through His suffering and death on the cross. (vv.19,14)
 - - Through that torturous self-sacrificing physical death of Christ, God has provided a way for humans to be reconciled to Him, even though we humans are born automatically alienated from Him and officially are an enemy of His. (vv.21-22)
 - - God desires that every person hears this message about how to be reconciled to Him and responds in faith, followed by being firmly grounded in the doctrines that comprise this message and the faith. (v.23)
 - - Following the example of Paul, the approach used in churches should be to knowledgably proclaim, admonish, and teach Christ and the Word of God, in order to facilitate the achieving of spiritual maturity in the life of every believer. (v.28)
 - - Churches and believers should take on the same perspective, mission, and ministry approach that Paul has - even if corresponding challenges, struggles, labor, suffering, and afflictions arise for them. (vv.2:1; 1:29,24)
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v.2:2 - READ

[Lesson Question: Consider the immediate context that surrounds and includes verses 2:2-3, and then analyze and describe what is the ministry philosophy and approach of Paul for new believers, and describe from each phrase in verses 2:2-3 how churches should imitate Paul's approach.]

SECTION POINT: Following the example of Paul, the local church and home groups should be actively helping new believers adjust to and continue in the faith by comforting them, encouraging them, loving them, and including them into their community environment.

"My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart"

- - Within the ministry work that Paul is laboring and struggling to facilitate the accomplishing of salvation and spiritual maturity in the lives of Gentiles, Paul is wanting

Gentile believers (including the Colossian believers) to be "comforted" and "encouraged in heart". (vv.1:28-2:1; v.2:2, Strong's #3870)

- - New believers can become overwhelmed and distressed when they initially start an actual relationship with God - learning about the seemingly countless numbers of expectations and commands that God has for them, and then trying to adopt and implement all of those commands and changes in their life.
- - In their distress and discouragement, new believers may quickly fade away or distance themselves from the faith. (cf. the 'rocky' soil in Matthew 13:5-6,20-21)
- - Paul sees this danger and is actively working to try to prevent this from happening.
- - So as a preventative remedy, Paul strives to comfort and "encourage [them] in heart", exhorting them in verses 2:6-7 to continue on in their faith after getting saved and become "rooted", "built up", and "strengthened in the faith".
- - Likewise, other believers, who are established in the faith, should be comforting and encouraging new believers in this same manner, which they can easily and naturally do within the environment of the local church and home groups.

"and united in love,"

- - Another aspect of what new believers experience upon getting saved is that previously they have not been an actual member of the community of believers in a church or ministry group, having an unqualified status which now abruptly and technically changes the moment they place their faith in Christ for salvation.
- - So their new spiritual walk in the faith would be significantly enhanced and fortified if they were expeditiously welcomed and brought into acceptance in the community of believers, "united in love" and spiritually "joined together" with other believers in a supportive community and fellowship environment. (Strong's #4822)
- - The bond of love is attractive, inspiring, and motivating.
- - Fellowship in an accepting community is also alluring, edifying, and helpful.
- - The local church and home groups can and should extend this kind of loving inclusion to new believers, playing a vital role in the spiritual life of new believers.

SECTION POINT: Further following the example of Paul, the local church and home groups should be actively facilitating new and immature believers in accessing, utilizing, and applying their indwelling God-empowered "wisdom and knowledge".

"so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding,"

- - A major portion of the objective of accomplishing spiritual maturity is to gain comprehensive "understanding" about God, and about what He says, and about what He does.
- - Typically, new believers know very little about God and understand almost nothing about Him correctly. (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14)
- - So, a main priority is to establish new believers (and all believers) in a regular activity in which they are progressing in gaining comprehensive or "complete understanding" about the various aspects of God.
- - Through the gaining of "complete understanding" about the various aspects of God, believers simultaneously gain "full assurance and entire confidence" that they know and understand the various aspects of God, whom they are now trying to please and serve. (Strong's #4136)

- - Equipped with the full confidence that they possess the knowledge and "complete understanding" about the various aspects of God, they can live their life in a manner that successfully pleases and obeys God, which will then produce "all or abundant" or "full" spiritual "riches" or blessings - which further add to and fortify their assurance and confidence. (v.1:10; v.2:2, Strong's #4149)

- - So again, believers in the conducive environments of the local church and home groups can and should facilitate the establishing of new believers (and all believers) in a regular activity of gaining comprehensive or "complete understanding" about the various aspects of God.

- - And the most effective way for the local church and home groups to dispense comprehensive understanding about the various aspects of God is through expository preaching and teaching - 'abundantly supplying' "the word of God in its fullness" by going verse-by-verse and phrase-by-phrase through books in the Bible, thoroughly teaching, exposing the meaning of, explaining, and applying all of the contained truths, concepts, doctrines, commands, warnings, implications, and etc. (v.1:25, from Strong's #4137 - 'replete')

"in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,"

- - Obtaining a "complete understanding" about the various aspects of God will necessarily feature obtaining a "full knowledge" of Christ. (Strong's #1922)

- - From the previous disclosure in verse 1:27, becoming a true believer automatically incurs the indwelling of "Christ in you", which by definition then includes having a "full knowledge" of Christ by means of a personal spirit-to-spirit relationship with Christ - the believer's spirit is in direct, personal, and continuous relationship with Christ's spirit, inside the believer's mind.

- - This indwelling of "Christ in you" is a new dynamic, previously hidden and undisclosed in history until it was instituted shortly after Christ's crucifixion and resurrection from the dead.

v.2:3 - "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

- - Because "all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form in Christ" (v.2:9) and because the spirit of Christ indwells believers (v.1:27), thereby through Christ, believers have indwelling direct access not only to the fullness of God but they also have indwelling direct access to a "full knowledge" of Christ (v.2:2, Strong's #1922) that includes "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" of God that "are hidden" in Christ.

- - A problem arises though, particularly for new believers and spiritually-immature believers, in that they either do not know how to effectively draw upon or utilize this indwelling God-empowered "wisdom and knowledge", or they do not want to draw upon and utilize it.

- - So again, believers in the conducive environments of the local church and home groups can and should facilitate new believers and spiritually-immature believers in understanding and effectively drawing upon or utilizing this indwelling God-empowered "wisdom and knowledge" that they have direct and personal access to through the indwelling of Christ in them.

- - Experienced guidance about how to discover and appropriately apply "all the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge" can and should also be offered and demonstrated by believers in the conducive environments of the local church and home groups. (James 3:13-18)

BIG IDEA: Local churches and home groups should follow the example of Paul by actively facilitating new believers and immature believers in adjusting, continuing, and growing in the faith, and in drawing on the indwelling power from God.

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS:

-- Does this church deliberately create environments that are specifically designed to facilitate new believers in becoming adjusted to the faith, and feeling loved and included in the community of believers in this church? If not, why not?

-- Should a mentoring program be started in this church, in which established mature believers mentor new believers and immature believers? If not, why not?

-- Or, should a discipleship course or class series be started in this church, in which the basics of the faith are taught to new believers?

-- Does this church have and regard home groups as a vital ministry of this church? If not, why not?

--- Does this church see that home groups are a fertile environment and effective way in which to help new believers and immature believers start progressing towards becoming established in the faith? If not, why not?

--- Does this church supply administrative oversight of its home groups, provide training support for their leaders, and publicly regularly encourage attendance in them? If not, why not?

-- You believers who are established in the faith, do you actively seek out new believers and comfort them, encourage them, love them, and include them in the community fellowship in the ministry groups that you attend? Or instead, do you essentially ignore new believers?

-- When new people visit this church or your ministry group, do you deliberately seek them out, initiate conversation with them, make them feel welcome, and genuinely show an interest in them? Or instead, do you essentially ignore them?

-- When people whom you are familiar with cease attending this church or your ministry group, do you contact them and encourage them to resume attending? Or instead, do you essentially ignore that they no longer attend?

-- Are the preaching and the teaching in this church and its ministry groups being presented in an expository form, exposing, explaining, and teaching verse-by-verse and phrase-by-phrase, with abundant relating applications to the hearers' lives? Or instead, are the preaching and the teaching in this church and its ministry groups essentially fluff, with very little actual Scripture content and usually no relating applications to the hearers' lives?

-- Exactly who in this church is doing preaching or teaching that is genuinely expository? Name them. How many do you count? Hold up your fingers.

-- Precisely what doctrines do each of the leaders, preachers, and teachers in this church hold regarding the indwelling and empowering of "Christ in you" (Colossians 1:27)?

For each of them, are all of their doctrines based on sound interpretation of Scriptures? Or instead, is the reality that "They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm" - 1 Timothy 1:7, in regard to the indwelling and empowering of the Holy Spirit or "Christ in you"?

- - How does this church treat persons in the congregation who have extensive credible Bible college and seminary training, and have sound doctrines, and have obvious spiritual gifting in preaching and teaching in an expository manner? Are they valued, requested, and recruited to do the preaching and teaching? Or instead, are they ignored or shunned?

- - Churches and its ministry groups will "reap what [they] sow" (Galatians 6:7b). If we sow everything that God directs us to, such as the contents in these verses of our study in Colossians, then we will reap a corresponding bountiful harvest of righteousness (Galatians 6:9-10). But if we sow to 'ignoring' and 'fluff', then we will reap a bountiful harvest that derives from 'ignoring' and 'fluff'. Our choice!

- - What can you do personally to contribute to this church and its ministry groups pursuing and implementing everything that God directs us to, such as the contents in these verses of our study in Colossians?

[Additional Lesson Questions to ponder (optional, if time allows):

- - For those of you who have ever been on a pastor search committee, when the candidate is being interviewed, have you ever heard any questions to the candidate about his philosophy of ministry, particularly in regard to the church creating environments that facilitate new believers in becoming established in the faith, similar to what is outlined in these verses of our study in Colossians? Or instead, is this topic of 'facilitating new believers in becoming established in the faith' never brought up? Describe what you have witnessed without disclosing identities.]

Works Cited:

Bible. "The Holy Bible: New International Version." *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

"Strong's Greek Dictionary." *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

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