

## Handout: Colossians Lesson 2

In 2:1, Paul is probably referring to his struggles on behalf of the Christians in the Lycus River Valley in three ways:

1. For the sake of the Gospel, Paul suffers imprisonment. His letters to the Philippians and Colossians were written from prison where he offers his suffering, united to Christ's suffering on the Cross, for the sake of all Christian communities of the universal Church.
2. He suffers in his intense offering of intercessory prayers, guided by the Holy Spirit, for the Colossians and other faith communities (see Rom 8:26 and Eph 6:18).
3. He also struggles under adverse conditions to compose his letters and to communicate the truth of the Gospel to the Church's newly founded communities and others persevering in faith despite difficult circumstances.

In 2:2-3 Paul makes a three-part petition to God on behalf of the communities in the Lycus River:

1. He prays that they will encourage one another in love expressed in their unity in Christ.
2. He prays they will experience the richness of understanding the Gospel of Christ.
3. He prays they will grasp the knowledge of the mystery of God's divine plan in the identity of Christ who is God enfleshed and His mission to bring salvation to humanity.

2:4 suggests the introduction of heresy into the communities of the Colossians and Laodiceans. The nature of the heresy has been a matter of debate among Biblical scholars. We can only deduce the nature of the heresy from Paul's incidental references to it in 2:8-23. Apparently, it was a doctrine that combined the elements from:

1. Hellenistic Greek paganism or philosophy (2:4, 8-10)
2. Jewish legalism (2:11-17)
3. Gnostic mysticism (2:18-23)
4. or a philosophy that is a combination of these various beliefs

*See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ.* There are threats to the Christian communities:

1. There are false teachers who want to gain control over the community and take them "captive."
2. These adversaries intend to captivate them with an empty, seductive philosophy.
3. Their philosophy is not rooted in Biblical revelation but in human precepts that are not from God.

These are old threats. The prophet Isaiah (Is 29:13) and Jesus (Mk 7:6-7) confronted such idolatrous human precepts.

"Human tradition" in verse 8 does not refer to the Church's authoritative teachings on the Gospel that we usually refer to as "Tradition" with a capital "T" (c.f., 1 Cor 11:2; 15:3-4; 2 Thes 2:15; 3:6; CCC 80-83). Tradition with a capital "T," our inheritance from the teachings of Jesus and His Apostles, is to be distinguished from tradition with a lowercase "t" that is the traditions passed down from the various theological, disciplinary, or devotional practices developed in the local churches over time. These are forms adapted to different places and times in the history of these communities that express the great Tradition through local festivals or devotions. These historically traditional →over

practices can be continued, modified, or abandoned under the guidance of the Church's Magisterium (see CCC 83).

The Sacred Tradition of the Gospel is passed on orally and in writing:

- *I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold fast to the traditions, just as I handed them on to you... For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...(1 Cor 11:2; 15:3-4).*
- *Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter... We instruct you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to shun any brother who conducts himself in a disorderly way and not according to the tradition they received from us (2 Thes 2:15; 3:6).*
- “Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.’ ‘And [Holy] Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully persevere, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching’” (CCC 81).
- “As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, ‘does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence’” (CCC 82).

*12 You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.*

The Baptismal ritual of being covered with water signifies dying with Christ while being raised up out of the water signifies a spiritual resurrection to new life (CCC 628). Jesus put no age limits on baptism; the Church has always baptized infants. In verses 12-14, Paul uses four vivid images to explain what happens at baptism:

1. There is a spiritual circumcision of the heart.
2. The baptized believer experiences a burial and rising with Christ.
3. God cancels the person's debt of sin that is now nailed to the Cross.
4. The believer can become Christ's partner in a victory over the spiritual enemies.

In verse 18, the false teachers are trying to disqualify the faithful Colossians as candidates for salvation because they do not take part in:

1. the humiliation of self-abasement (voluntary self-punishment or humiliation in order to atone for some real or imagined wrongdoing).
2. the worship of angels
3. receive visions

All their false ideas are “inflated without reason” by their “mind of flesh” and nullify the work of Christ for humanity's salvation.