

Colossians 2:1-5

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, 2 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, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. 5 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 Christ.

The world is full of plausible arguments, isn't it? There are all sorts of excuses to be made for sin—quite convincing excuses. We hear them, and even more, most of us occasionally make them—if you never have, you're a much better Christian for me, and I'm sure they have a special seat arranged for you at the heavenly feast: the jester's. And that's a dangerous thing, to get sucked into such thinking. It slowly dulls our conscience. It slowly stops our ears to the living voice of God in the Scriptures. It stunts our prayers. It distracts us on our walk in Christ, so that we stumble or stray. And all the while, we convince ourselves that God can't really be too mad about any of it, because we have our reasons, good reasons, for choosing our way instead of His, our will instead of His. But nothing could be further from the truth. God can be mad. God does get mad. He is a jealous God, as He reminds us in the Ten Commandments. He does not want His glory given to another. And when we accept such plausible arguments, when we delude ourselves with them, we make ourselves our god. But even more, more than He is angry, He is grieved, for He has given His Son for us, to make us His own, and we are selling ourselves cheaply to others, whether to people, things, thoughts, or words. It is as if your parents were to give you a family heirloom precious to them and you hawked it at the nearest pawn shop for a few crummy dollars. And to top it all off, we in so doing at the same time trade our eternity for the passing moment, for the fleeting pleasure, for the short-lived trend, or whatever it is we are chasing.

Sure, the unmarried can save money living together. That's a fine argument, isn't it? But can they remain in a right relationship with their Lord while doing so? They might tell themselves they can, but God's Word says something entirely different. Sure, the unhappy spouse can find temporary relief by leaving his or her marriage or through a fling with someone else, but can he or she do so and avoid the wrath of the Lord who says He hates divorce, mincing no words? God's Word leaves little doubt about the answer. Only true repentance can restore what such unfaithfulness shatters between man and God. The flustered individual can search for peace of mind in a bottle, but will drunkenness bring lasting respite? No, it most certainly will not, not in this life, and not for the next. Spewing anger might make us feel better for a time, but we will be forgiven as we forgive others, and God's anger toward us will be as our anger toward others. Examples could be given until we were blue in the face. Sin kills. Every sin. That's its nature from the first sin in Eden. Even the ones we esteem but lightly. And yes, God forgives sinners, but He forgives repentant sinners, sinners who sorrow over their sin and want no more to do with it, not those who have turned the gospel into a license to abuse His grace and selectively listen to His Word.

Paul knew the danger that such plausible arguments posed for the Colossians. And the world hasn't changed, even if we have smartphones now. Our old Adam is still at the ready with excuses, with fanciful explanations, with alluring delusions. But as the world has remained essentially the same—a man is a man, whether in the first century or the twenty-first, in a toga or

blue jeans—God’s Word hasn’t started to sing a new tune either. It is trustworthy and true as ever, and we do well to hearken to it, to make it our mirror and guide. And when we do so, we will see ourselves and our hollow pretexts for what we and they are. And in Christ we will find a Physician, who yearns and is able to forgive and renew the sinner and leave such excuses in His empty tomb—He’s not using it, after all—as a new man or woman is brought again to spiritual life and vitality, equipped with His help to struggle against those arguments and delusions that once captivated him or her. Paul’s prayer for the Colossians is a good one for us to pray for each other as well, that our *“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.”* Amen.