

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, June 24, 2026 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



COLOSSIANS: ROOTED IN CHRIST – PART 7 *“Avoiding Spiritual Deception”* *Colossians 2:1-5*

“¹For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, ² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. ⁵ For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.” – Colossians 2:1-5 (NKJV)

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND FOR COLOSSIANS

The following is some of the general background information for the book of Colossians. Let's quickly review what we have previously said about the book of Colossians just to give us a bit of context...

Some General Background Information on Colossians:

(1) **The author of Colossians = The Apostle Paul** - The Apostle Paul identifies himself as the author (1:1; 4:18)

- (2) **An important character in Colossians = Epaphras** - Epaphras likely planted the church by bringing the gospel he heard under Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:10) back to his home city of Colossae (1:7; 4:12)
- (3) **Date, place and type of writing = A.D. 60-62, A prison epistle/letter written from Rome** - Paul writes this letter from a Roman prison around 60-62 AD (4:16)
- (4) **Important information about Colossae = Small but diverse city** - Colossae was a small but diverse city in Rome's Asia province, modern day Turkey
- (5) **2 key words to understand Colossae = Pluralism and syncretism** - They were immersed in an environment of pluralism and syncretism where most people simply borrowed from the religious and philosophical ideas of the day
- (6) **Identified false teaching/doctrine in Colossians = "The Colossian Heresy"** - Throughout the book Paul hints at a "Colossian heresy." However, he focuses on Christ-centered, correct teaching rather than the contents of the false teaching
- (7) **What we know about this false teaching/doctrine = It is "not according to Christ"** - Whatever this false teaching is, it is "not according to Christ" (2:8) and it undermines the sole supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus
- (8) **John Calvin's summary of Colossians = "This Epistle...to express it in one word, distinguishes the true Christ from a fictitious one."**
- (9) **Layout of the book = Half doctrinal, half practical** - Like other Pauline letters, the first half builds a rich theology that the second half exhorts us to then live out
- (10) **Relation to other N.T. books = Ephesians and Colossians are companion books** - These two books/letters were written around the same time, and they overlap greatly and can help explain one another

Our theme verse for this study is Colossians 2:6-7. This passage not only serves as a premise for this particular study, it also identifies a primary purpose for Paul's letter...

"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷ rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving." -Colossians 2:6-7 (NKJV)

Application Questions

- 1. Most people join cults because of relationships or feelings, not doctrines. What are the practical implications of this?**

3 Reasons Why Cults Prosper: Josh McDowell, “*Handbook of Today’s Religions*”

- 1. The cults provide answers** – A major reason the cults are flourishing is that in an unsure world they provide authoritative answer to man’s basic questions: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?
 - 2. The cults meet human needs** – Cults flourish because they appeal to man’s basic human need. All of us need to be loved, to feel needed, to sense our lives have direction and meaning. Individuals who experience an identity crisis or have emotional problems are particularly susceptible to cults.
 - 3. The cults make a favorable impression** – If the church fails to carefully and seriously provide spiritual warmth and true exposition of the Word of God, those with spiritual needs will find other avenues of fulfillment. Many cults prey on ignorance, and try to impress the uninformed with pseudo-scholarship. An example is The Way International’s leader, Victor Paul Wierwille, who quotes profusely from Hebrew and Greek sources in an attempt to give the impression of scholarship. Representatives of Jehovah’s Witnesses who go door to door give a similar impression of great learning. To combat this, the believer must know what he or she believes and why he or she believes it and thus be able to expose the cult’s teachings.
- 2. Why are churches that emphasize love often weak on doctrine and vice versa? How can we lovingly hold firmly to the truth?**
 - 3. Discuss: Is it arrogant to believe that you know the truth on specific biblical issues?**
 - 4. How can we differentiate a major doctrine worth dividing over from a lesser doctrine where we need to show tolerance?**

We live in a time of unprecedented widespread deception. The past year saw 750 documented data breaches, stealing the private information of 178 million Americans. When identity thieves get your credit card numbers they can print up phony cards and take out cash or run up bills in your name. When they steal your Social Security number, they can file a tax form and steal your tax refund.

Telephone scammers prey on everyone, but especially on the elderly. The biggest scam is fraudsters who pose as agents of the IRS, telling people that they will be arrested or their property seized for back taxes if they do not pay up immediately. Another popular scam consists of people posing as employees of tech companies who tell you that your computer has a virus. They need remote access to your computer and your passwords so that they can “fix” the problems. And, for a fee, they will provide a year’s worth of “tech support.” (These statistics and examples are from an AARP email)

While these schemes can cost people financially, spiritual deception can result in a person’s eternal ruin. Satan has been employing his deceptive lies since the Garden. Warning the

Corinthians about not receiving a false Jesus or a different gospel, the apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:3, *“³ But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”*

Key Verses to Remember -Warnings About Satan the Ultimate Deceiver:

1. **Matthew 24:4-5:** .
2. **Colossians 2:8:** *“⁸ Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”*
3. **1 Timothy 4:1:** *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,”*
4. **John 8:32:** *“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*
5. **James 4:7:** *“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”*
6. **Revelation 12:9:** *“⁹ So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”*

Key Verses to Remember - Warnings About False Teachers and Prophets:

1. **Matthew 7:15:** *“¹⁵ Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”*
2. **2 Corinthians 11:13-15:** *“¹³ For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”*
3. **2 Peter 2:1:** *“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.”*
4. **2 Timothy 4:3-4:** *“³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”*
5. **Galatians 1:6-7:** *“⁶ I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.”*
6. **1 John 4:1:** *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*

Satan has used the false teaching of the cults to lure many away from the true gospel that the apostles preached. Invariably, these groups prey on unsuspecting, untaught people in evangelical churches. They use the Bible and claim to believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord. But they deny the trinity, including Jesus’ deity. They deny the gospel of Christ’s

substitutionary atonement and salvation by grace through faith alone. Tragically, they lead their followers into eternal damnation. Here are some of the more prevalent and dangerous false teaching infiltrating the church today...

9 Types of False Gospels Destroying Churches Today

(1) The Self-Improvement Gospel That Many in the Church Have Adopted – Truth be known, many in the church today are trapped in this false gospel – countless books, seminars, and positive thinking programs promising you can transform your life through human effort... follow this prescription, take these self-help efforts to have your “best life” (Joel Osteen)

The lie: You have the power within yourself to transform your life and achieve happiness.

The truth: *“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?”* (Jeremiah 17:9).

This false gospel leads to deeper despair when your best efforts fail. Only when I surrendered completely to Christ did I find the peace that human effort could never provide.

(2) The Social Justice Gospel Infiltrating Evangelical Churches - I’ve watched this terrible and I believe very dangerous false ideology creep into denominations that used to preach the cross, now more concerned with social activism than soul salvation. It has literally ruined some great preachers and their reputation along with their churches (J.D. Greear, David Platt, Matt Chandler, etc.)

The lie: Your value and purpose come from advancing the right causes and standing on the correct side of social issues.

The truth: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works”* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Fighting injustice feels morally superior, but when political activism becomes the path to righteousness, we’ve created another form of works-salvation. The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals has addressed how social justice ideology can compromise the Gospel message.

(3) The Prosperity Gospel: A Counterfeit Gospel of Material Blessing - I’ve seen this destructive teaching up close in Pentecostal circles, watching it destroy people who blamed themselves when prayers weren’t answered or blessings didn’t materialize.

Theologian Michael Horton addresses this extensively in *Christless Christianity*, showing how prosperity teaching fundamentally contradicts justification by faith alone.

The lie: God's love is measured by your material circumstances, and faith is a formula for getting what you want.

The truth: *"Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (2 Timothy 3:12).

It makes God their personal genie rather than the sovereign Lord who deserves worship and obedience.

- (4) The Therapeutic Deism That Avoids God's Justice** – This may be encountered many churches today... it's all about God's love but conveniently ignoring His justice and wrath. Sometime called Moral Therapeutic Deism, it teaches 1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth. 2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. 3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. 4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. 5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

The lie: God exists to serve your emotional needs and would never make demands that cause discomfort.

The truth: *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"* (Proverbs 9:10).

I watched pastors get visibly uncomfortable mentioning "hell" because members got offended. We taught kids they were made perfect by God, so they can't handle God's justice when they encounter biblical truth.

- (5) The Moral Performance Gospel Learned Growing Up in Some Churches** - This is personal because it's what many are raised thinking in the church today... if I'm just good enough, if I do enough – everything is about the works we did, regular church attendance, confession, good deeds, and earning our way into heaven.

The lie: If you're generally good and avoid major sins, you'll be acceptable to God.

The truth: *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23).

This appeals to human pride, suggesting we can earn heaven through moral effort. We must understand that even my best efforts are "filthy rags" before a holy God.

The Westminster Confession of Faith has long addressed this error in works-based salvation systems.

- (6) The Universal Acceptance Gospel of Progressive Christianity** - I've seen this false gospel take over entire denominations that once preached biblical truth. progressive Christians use Christian language, Scripture, and emotion to validate teachings that directly contradict the Bible. They redefine sin, affirm lifestyles that Scripture calls us to repent from, and reduce salvation to a vague message of self-love. In doing so, they lead others down a path that feels spiritual — but is ultimately separated from Christ. Jesus warned about this kind of deception: *“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves”* (Matthew 7:15). Progressive Christianity often wears that sheep’s clothing well. But it leaves people spiritually lost, thinking they’re saved while embracing a gospel that has no power to save.

The lie: God accepts everyone regardless of what they believe, as long as they’re sincere.

The truth: *“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me’”* (John 14:6).

This appeals to our desire to avoid offense and appear tolerant, but it makes Christ’s death meaningless. The Lausanne Covenant affirms the biblical position that salvation comes only through Christ, directly contradicting universalist teachings.

- (7) The Personal Experience Gospel That Elevates Feelings Over Scripture –**

The lie: If something feels right to you or works in your experience, it must be true regardless of what the Bible says

The truth: *“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick”* (Jeremiah 17:9).

This makes each person their own ultimate authority, leading to spiritual chaos that contradicts clear biblical teaching. Reformed theologian R.C. Sproul addressed this issue extensively in *Knowing Scripture*, emphasizing the objective authority of God’s Word over subjective experience. For a comprehensive understanding of why Scripture alone must be our ultimate authority, biblical authority provides the only reliable foundation for distinguishing truth from error.

- (8) The Cheap Grace Gospel: False Gospel Teaching Without Repentance** - This might be the most dangerous false gospel because it sounds so close to the true Gospel. I’ve encountered this counterfeit gospel in Baptist circles that should know better. Theologian

Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned against this in *The Cost of Discipleship*, calling it “grace without discipleship, grace without the cross.”

The lie: You can accept Jesus as Savior without making Him Lord, continuing in sin without spiritual consequences.

The truth: *“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be!”* (Romans 6:1-2).

For a comprehensive examination of this dangerous false gospel teaching, read: Cheap Grace vs. Biblical Grace: Why True Grace Always Transforms.

(9) The “Love is Love” Gospel That Redefines Biblical Love - This false gospel has taken over and been fully taken in by progressive Christianity and is making inroads into evangelical circles, representing one of the most culturally accepted counterfeit gospel messages today.

The lie: True love means accepting and celebrating all forms of human relationship and self-expression without moral judgment, no matter what the antiquated Bible says

The truth: *“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments”* (John 14:15).

This redefines love as unconditional affirmation rather than caring enough to speak truth. Conservative theologian Albert Mohler has written extensively on this topic at AlbertMohler.com, showing how biblical love requires adherence to God’s design for human relationships.

“¹For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, ²that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. ⁵For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.” – Colossians 2:1-5 (NKJV)

As we’ve seen, false teachers were threatening the new Colossian church...

- They probably had not yet gained many followers—at this point Paul was still *“rejoicing to see your [their] good order and steadfastness of your faith in Christ.”* (Col. 2:5).
- But these wolves (false teachers) were mingling among the flock (the sheep), so Paul was concerned.
- In our text, he gives them a dose of preventative medicine.

- He wrote in Colossians 2:4, “*Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.*” To be forewarned was to be forearmed. Since the eternal destiny of precious souls is at stake, we need to heed his counsel on how to avoid spiritual deception. To sum up:

KEY THOUGHT: We avoid spiritual deception by being committed to a loving, Christ-centered church

Before we explore Paul’s counsel, I mention that these verses could be expounded in a different direction. Paul is continuing to talk about his ministry (Col. 1:24-29). In Colossians 1:29, he said that he was *striving* according to God’s mighty power. In Colossians 2:1, he uses the same Greek word to tell his readers that he had a great *struggle* on their behalf, which he goes on to describe. So we could develop these verses along the lines of some vital principles for ministry...

Some Vital Principles for Ministry (Service):

- (1) Heartfelt love and concern for the spiritual well-being of the church (including these people whom he had never met)
- (2) Prayer (“struggle”) undergirding everything
- (3) A strong emphasis on teaching the truth along with loving relationships
- (4) Being Christ-centered and Christ-exalting in such teaching
- (5) Warning newer believers about the danger of being carried away by false teachers who like to prey on the flock
- (6) Encouraging others to be disciplined and stand firm in Christ.

But you’ll have to work on those points on your own. I want to pursue the theme of avoiding spiritual deception, because it is no less a threat in our day than it was in Paul’s.

How May We Avoid Spiritual Deception:

1. To avoid spiritual deception, recognize that it is a serious danger
2. To avoid spiritual deception, be committed to a loving church
3. To avoid spiritual deception, be committed to a Christ-centered church

TO AVOID SPIRITUAL DECEPTION, RECOGNIZE THAT IT IS A SERIOUS DANGER

CASE STUDY: Years ago, while walking from your car to your apartment in a large inner city, you were mugged at gunpoint just in from of your apartment building. After that traumatic event, you never made that short walk without looking around for potential danger and feeling uneasy and filled with anxiety. Often at night you would see women standing near where you were mugged that night, chatting together without a thought that they may be in a dangerous place. But you never felt safe in that area at

night. And after that traumatic night when you were attacked, you were always alert and on guard. Even to this day, if you venture outside in a public place after dark, you keep your eyes open for possible attackers. If you're unaware of potential danger, you're more likely to fall prey to it.

- (1) What are your thoughts about this scenario? Do you think you might feel the same way if this were you? Why?*
- (2) What are some wise precaution you might take to alleviate your anxiety and trauma in this situation?*
- (3) Do you agree or disagree with the final statement in the case study, "If you're aware of potential danger, you're more likely to fall prey to it"?*
- (4) How might this apply to the idea of avoiding spiritual deception in our lives as believers?*

The problem with spiritual deception is that it's always more subtle and conniving than an armed, frontal attack.

- Paul warned that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light and his servants as servants of righteousness...
- 2 Corinthians 11:14-15, *"¹⁴ And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform*
- Satan doesn't come in a red suit with horns and a pitchfork, laughing wickedly as he promises to take you with him to hell.
- He comes offering greater "light" on difficult issues.
- His servants are not outwardly, obviously evil.
- They pose as servants of righteousness, promising freedom, while inwardly they are enslaved by various lusts...
- 2 Peter 2:18-19, *"¹⁸ For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. ¹⁹ While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage."*
- Jesus warned about wolves in sheep's clothing in Matthew 7:15, *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves."*
- Their disguise enabled them to mix among the flock, but their aim was to destroy for their own gain.

In our text (Col. 2:4), Paul warns about those who would "delude you with persuasive argument." They were promising "deeper knowledge of mysteries" and "secret wisdom" that would help you in your Christian life. But they were promoting a message that appealed to the flesh. They claimed to have a deeper philosophy than the simple gospel of faith in Christ. They claimed to be holier than the apostles because of their self-abasement, rules,

and severe treatment of the body (Col. 2:23). But they were promoting a religion that feeds pride, not the message of the cross.

It's amazing how many different false teachings and teachers continue to prey on the Lord's flock in our day. I recently saw an article on a "Bible study" group in Colorado where everyone smokes pot (which is legal there and coming here soon!). The members testified that studying the Bible in traditional churches had always been boring to them, but when they smoke pot, they see new insights and the Bible is much more interesting. And a local pastor is helping them study the Bible without confronting their drug use!

Beyond that, the cults are as active as ever, going door-to-door in our neighborhoods and recruiting people by appealing to their "strong family emphasis." Among professing evangelicals, there are "churches" that gather in bars and sip cocktails while they discuss the Bible and current topics of interest. Seeker sensitive churches avoid mentioning anything negative, such as sin or judgment, which might make seekers feel uncomfortable. Rather than explain and apply the Bible, they show movie clips and give self-help messages about how you can succeed in your marriage or career. They picture God as our Good Buddy on the journey, a "life-coach" who is there rooting for us, even when we sin. If we're oblivious to these and many other deceptive schemes of the devil, we're more likely to fall prey to them.

Why Spiritual Deception Is So Dangerous:

Spiritual deception is dangerous because it is not just a passive lie — it is an **active, strategic distortion of truth** designed to mislead, confuse, and keep people from aligning with God's will divinesovereignty.com. It operates subtly, often disguised as wisdom, love, or divine guidance, making it hard to detect without discernment divinesovereignty.com+1.

1. **It Targets the Soul's Clarity**- Deception is a key weapon in spiritual warfare, aimed at creating **spiritual blindness** so the soul cannot discern the enemy's schemes. This loss of clarity can lead to poor decisions, wasted spiritual energy, and missed opportunities for growth.
2. **It Exploits Weaknesses**- The enemy preys on **ignorance, pride, fear, and unresolved wounds** to distort truth and manipulate belief. Spiritual ignorance leaves believers vulnerable, as God warns that *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6)*
3. **It Can Be Inward and Outward**- Deception doesn't always come from outside. It can begin **within** when we accept false ideas about God or ourselves, or when we misinterpret His love and justice. This self-deception can be just as damaging as external manipulation.
4. **It Leads to Division and Bondage**- False teachings and false prophets can **foster division** in communities and relationships, and lies about identity and purpose can create **emotional and spiritual bondage**.

- 5. It Has Long-Term Consequences**- Sin and deception often harden hearts, leading to repeated failure, discouragement, and spiritual death. False prophets “will secretly introduce destructive heresies” that can bring swift destruction on themselves and others.
- 6. It Masks Itself as Good**- The world often calls evil good and good evil, so deception can appear harmless or even beneficial, making it harder to resist

In summary... Spiritual deception is dangerous because it is **systematic, subtle, and insidious**, attacking the very foundation of truth and alignment with God. It can be both external and internal, and its effects — confusion, division, bondage, and spiritual death — are severe. The Bible urges believers to **test the spirits** (1 John 4:1) and to guard against false teachings to protect their souls

TO AVOID SPIRITUAL DECEPTION, BE COMMITTED TO A LOVING CHURCH

Let me be quick to add that “loving” isn’t the only criterion! The cults draw people in by showing them “love.” Perhaps the most egregious example was the Children of God cult, where the women used sex to lure unsuspecting men into the group. But other less flagrant examples abound, where the cults offer lonely people a sense of belonging and fellowship. So love is not the only necessary quality to look for.

But it is an essential quality. Paul’s heartfelt love and concern for these believers whom he had not even met is evident. Although not directly stated here, his concern for them is similar to his concern for the new Thessalonian believers, where he compares himself to a gentle, nursing mother and to a loving, concerned father (1 Thess. 2:7, 11).

Notice verses 1-2 of our passage (Colossians 2:1-2)...

“¹For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, ² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ.”

In **Colossians 2:2**, he expresses his desire or prayer for these dear people, along with the believers in Laodicea, *“² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ.”*

That reminds me of Paul’s prayer for the **Ephesians 3:16-19**... notice it, *“¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the*

width and length and depth and height—¹⁹to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

In both prayers, Paul connects spiritually apprehending God’s blessings in Christ with being a part of a loving fellowship of believers.

- F. F. Bruce observed (*The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans], p. 95), “Paul emphasizes that the revelation of God cannot be properly known apart from the cultivation of brotherly love within the community.”
- N. T. Wright (*Colossians and Philemon* [IVP/Eerdmans], pp. 94-95) explains, “Living in a loving and forgiving community will assist growth in understanding, and vice versa, as truth is confirmed in practice and practice enables truth to be seen in action and so to be fully grasped.”

Our text implies three qualities of a loving church:

3 Qualities of a Loving Church:

- (1) **A loving church is a praying church** - Although it’s not directly stated, most commentators think that Paul’s great “struggle” for these believers whom he had not met was his struggle in prayer. He uses the verb related to that noun when he refers (Col. 4:12) to Epaphras, who is *“always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers.”* We get our word “agonizing” from this Greek word. It was used of wrestlers, straining every fiber in their bodies as they struggled to defeat their opponents.

In Colossians 4:2-3, Paul specifically calls this church to prayer, *“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well”* There are two things to take away from this.

2 Key Take Aways:

1. **If you love people, you will pray for them** - If they’re on your heart, you take them often before God’s throne of grace, asking Him to keep them from the many snares of this world and to help them to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. I encourage you to pray through our church directory. Even if you don’t know these people (Paul didn’t know the Colossians or Laodiceans personally), it puts them on your heart. When you meet them, there is an instant bond of fellowship if you’ve been praying for them.
 2. **The word “struggle” implies that praying for others is not easy** - If you find praying for others to be difficult, welcome to the process! As Paul says in Ephesians 6:12, we are doing battle against *“the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”*
- (2) **A loving church practices heartfelt concern for one another** - Paul’s heart of concern for these new believers oozes through this text, and he wants their hearts to be encouraged

or strengthened as they are knit together in love. True Christianity is a matter of the heart or inward person. It's not about outward conformity or appearance, but about love for God and one another from the heart. It's not about keeping up an image or veneer of righteousness by rules, but rather about how we think and live when others aren't looking.

(3) A loving church seeks the highest good of each person, namely, to know Christ and grow in Him - As we saw in Colossians 1:28, Paul's aim was to present every person complete or mature in Christ. Love seeks the highest good of others, which is, that the person knows Christ in a saving way and that he or she is growing in Christ. Since sin always destroys people, love means that if you see a brother or sister in sin or straying from the Lord, you go to them in a humble, gentle spirit and seek to restore them to the Lord (Gal. 6:1). If you hear a fellow Christian saying things that are contrary to sound doctrine, you talk with him and try to reason from Scripture to show him his error.

So to avoid spiritual deception, be aware of the danger. Be committed to a loving church. There is safety when you're in the fold with the other sheep. If you venture out on your own, the wolves are waiting!

TO AVOID SPIRITUAL DECEPTION, BE COMMITTED TO A CHRIST-CENTERED CHURCH

In chapter 1, Paul has shown that as the creator of the universe and the head of the church, Christ is supreme over all things. He said that the riches of the glory of the mystery that God has now revealed is, *"Christ in you, the hope of glory"* (Col. 1:27).

"² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." – Colossians 2:2-3 (NKJV)

In Colossians 2:2b-3, probably countering the false teachers who emphasized their secret knowledge of the mysteries of God, Paul comes back to that theme and says that he wants these believers to attain *"to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."* He also in Colossians 2:5 commends their *"good order (discipline) and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ."* Clearly, Christ and the gospel must be the center of a solid church.

Note 5 Things About a Christ-Centered Church:

(1) A Christ-centered church is a Bible-centered church - The Bible is our only source of divine revelation about the person and work of Jesus Christ and the Bible is Christ-centered. The Old Testament points ahead to Jesus. As Alec Motyer asserts (*A Christian's Pocket Guide to Loving the Old Testament* [Christian Focus], p. 19, 25),

“Without the Old Testament, we could not know Jesus properly.... Without the Old Testament we would not understand our New Testament properly.” The Gospels tell us how God took on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. The rest of the New Testament interprets and applies the person, teaching, and work of Christ. The final book of the New Testament, the Revelation, points to His second coming in power and glory. So if a church is not centered on the Bible, it is not centered on Jesus Christ. If a church does not teach the Bible on a consistent basis, you will not be equipped to withstand the deceptive schemes of the devil. In a genuinely loving church, you will receive sound teaching, both from the pulpit and from mature believers. Sometimes, sound teaching will confront where your life is not in line with God’s revealed will. Don’t dodge that! It’s easy to find churches that tell you what you *want* to hear to make you feel good. You need a church that, like a good doctor, tells you what you *need* to hear for spiritual health and growth (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

- (2) **A Christ-centered church is a spiritually discerning church** - Discernment is a scarce commodity in modern evangelical circles. If you advocate discernment, you may be accused of being judgmental or intolerant. I am stunned... stunned at times at how non-discerning and unperceptive some Christian can be... it just seems so many professing believe are gullible and naïve. I see evidence of it routinely... and some may say “That sounds very judgmental and arrogant to say!” I am not saying we can’t all make mistake. I am saying that we have the Word of God as our guide and that everything we hear and see should be help up to the light of God’s Word, and prayerfully brought before the God.

I agree that there are some secondary matters where we must not be dogmatic and I agree that we must be kind and gracious when we defend the truth (2 Tim. 2:24-26). But I disagree strongly that we must be tolerant and accepting of diverse views on clear biblical doctrines and moral issues. Without sound doctrine and biblically-based discernment, God’s people will be “carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Eph. 4:14).

- (3) **A Christ-centered church is growing to understand all the treasures of wisdom and understanding that are in Christ** - Paul says that full assurance comes from understanding and knowing God’s mystery, which is Christ (some manuscripts omit, “of the Father”). When Paul says that Christ is God’s “mystery,” and that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are “hidden” in Him, he does not mean that these things are reserved for an elite, insider few. Rather, he is countering the false teachers, who appealed to people with their inside secrets. By “mystery,” Paul means truth that formerly was concealed, but now is plainly revealed for all to see. The Old Testament promised the coming Redeemer and King, but the specifics were blurry until Jesus came on the scene, much like we’re fuzzy on the details about end time prophecies that have not yet been fulfilled.

By saying that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are “hidden” in Christ, Paul is reflecting Proverbs 2:4-5, which says of wisdom, understanding, and discernment, *“If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.”*

It takes some effort and diligence to mine out the riches that are in Christ. But the point is, He is our all-sufficient treasure for our every need. As W. H. Griffith Thomas states (*Studies in Colossians and Philemon* [Kregel], p. 78), *“The only safeguard against error for the Christian is a full knowledge of Christ.”*

(4) **A Christ-centered church practices unity on essential biblical truth, and loving tolerance on non-essentials** - *“Knit together”* sometimes means *“instructed.”* But it also means *“knit or held together”* (see Col. 2:19), which is probably the meaning here. But note that the unity is not divorced from understanding and true knowledge of Christ. As Paul states in Ephesians 4:13, 15, we are to attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God as we speak the truth in love. There are core biblical truths that we must understand clearly and be willing to fight for and, if necessary, divide over or even die for. To compromise these truths would be to deny the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are other areas of doctrine and practice where godly people differ. While some of these areas are important for how we live, they do not jeopardize the gospel. We may debate these issues vigorously, but we must always regard the other person as a brother or sister in Christ and treat him or her with love.

(5) **A Christ-centered church is disciplined and stable in its faith in Christ** - *“Good discipline”* and *“stability”* picture a military unit that is disciplined in its fighting order, that has closed ranks so that the false teachers cannot break through. Sam Storms (samstorms.com) writes, *“The word translated ‘good order’ points to the well-ordered behavior of the Colossians. He has in mind lives that are aligned with biblical revelation, daily habits of life that reflect the values of Jesus, unwavering obedience to the will of God, no matter how unpopular or ‘unsuccessful’ that may prove to be. ‘Stability’ is the opposite of trendy, flashy, or sensational. Stable churches don’t chase after the latest fad or church growth techniques. They don’t keep people hyped up with speculations about how close we may be to the rapture (because we can’t know exactly when Jesus will return). They don’t promote the latest self-help insights on how you can have a successful life, marriage, or career. Stable churches, frankly, are kind of boring! But we are to be stable in our faith in Christ. The biblical gospel is a sure foundation to guard us against spiritual deception.”*

CONCLUSION

In *The Truth War* [Thomas Nelson, 2007], John MacArthur argues that faithfulness to Christ demands that we fight for the truth of the gospel. But the modern evangelical church, swayed

by the worldly emphasis on tolerance and “love,” has become apathetic to the whole concept of truth.

In the introduction, he states (p. xvii), “Church leaders are obsessed with style and methodology, losing interest in the glory of God and becoming grossly apathetic about truth and sound doctrine.” He adds (p. xviii, brackets in original), “What we desperately need today are ‘shepherds according to [God’s] heart, who will feed [believers] with knowledge and understanding’ (Jeremiah 3:15; Acts 20:28-31).”

That’s what Paul was arguing for in our text. The enemy has many servants who are trying to delude you with their persuasive arguments to water down the truth about Christ. But you can avoid spiritual deception by being committed to a loving, Christ-centered church.

How Christians Can Avoid Spiritual Deception:

Christians can guard against spiritual deception by combining **Scripture-based discernment, practical habits, and spiritual discipline.**

1. Recognize the patterns of deception

False teachings often sound hopeful but contradict clear biblical truth, appeal to emotion or popularity, minimize sin, and claim supernatural insight without biblical testing (1 John 4:1; 2 Peter 2:1-3) Bible Hub.

2. Anchor yourself in the whole counsel of Scripture

Make daily, systematic Bible study a habit (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 119:105). Compare every teaching to Scripture, keep context in view, and memorize key passages on discernment (Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17) Bible Hub.

3. Test every message and messenger

Ask if the teaching exalts Christ as Lord in the flesh, aligns with the gospel of grace, and produces righteousness. Observe the teacher’s lifestyle and fruit, and require confirmation from multiple Scripture references (Deuteronomy 19:15; 2 Corinthians 13:1) Bible Hub+1.

4. Cultivate a truth-loving heart

Pray for a spirit that delights in truth over comfort (Psalm 51:6). Confess sin quickly, embrace correction, and train your affections toward doctrinally rich worship and the lives of faithful saints Bible Hub.

5. Stay planted in a discerning community

Gather regularly where the Word is preached verse by verse (Hebrews 10:24-25). Invite accountability from trusted believers who can spot deception early (Proverbs 27:17) Bible Hub+1.

6. Keep the armor of God buckled on

Wear the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith, and sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:10-18) to resist lies and protect your mind Bible Hub.

7. Watch for flattery and false peace

Be alert to messages that promise safety while ignoring God's holiness or judgment, as these often mask deception (Ezekiel 21:29) Bible Hub.

8. Live what you know

Abiding in Christ's Word leads to freedom from deception (John 8:31-32). Obedience turns knowledge into protection Bible Hub.

By combining **Scripture as your compass, community accountability, and spiritual vigilance**, Christians can stay grounded in truth and avoid being led astray.