

W342_Colossians_2.mp3

[00:00:02] This is a recording made in the chapel of the opened book, and it is number two of a study in the epistle to the Colossians. In our first and opening study, we had a little sketch, as it were. Just to enforce what are two outstanding features. That it was purely a human invention and is binding upon nobody. We are having another view of the whole of the epistles in this study. And although it may still be marked with a little element of human frailty. This is authoritative in the sense that you can test it and you can discover that there is a definite literary structure underneath the surface. Not spoiling it, not obvious, but there most certainly the moment you look for it. You will find this is characteristic of the scriptures. Old Testament and new. I wouldn't say positively that there's a structure to be discovered in every book because I haven't given the 66 books that attention. But I think I can say from personal investigation that I could demonstrate that there was a structure to over 50 of them, and that looks a good long way to proving that the rest would be in exactly the same method. It's very much like the works of God's hands on the surface. You look at a rose or you look at a one of these dahlias that are here Christmas, the Michaelmas daisies, the dahlias, all beautiful colors, lovely flowers, and that's what they're for.

[00:01:49] But if you looked at it with another eye, as it were, you would see beauties and marvels that are underneath, which are structural. You would discover that there is a wonderful distribution, the way in which they balance all the marvelous economy of their growth and it's characteristic of the Word of God. You see a beautiful leaf of a plant. And at the end of it, if you watch a little bit more closely, you see the veins radiating the cells on either side and it begins to take a certain distinctive pattern. Exactly the same with the scriptures. On the surface, it looks as though the apostle wrote it just out of his own heart and he lay it down. But there was a superintending hand that the Apostle didn't know was guiding him in the selection of every word he used so that we can come back to it and quote his own words when he spoke about the words which the Holy Ghost use in comparing spiritual with spiritual. Well, now it happens. The top part of this chart, which you have in front of you, it opens under the letter A. The letters are only there to help you subdivide. They are no part of it, but it's just a little index. The Capital letter A chapter one verses 1 to 8, three up three. A salutation ministry. The right. Right down to the bottom. The chapter.

[00:03:20] 3 or 4 verses 17 and 18. Salutation Ministry. Archippus. In our meeting last time. I think, a salutation. On the tape recording to all those, especially in distant places, who may be listening. About through what the BBC call a technical. Now, do you say itch or hitch a technical, whatever it is? The salutation was not included. So we are beginning at the beginning this time, and we make up for what we lost last time and say that just as the Apostle didn't feel it beyond him and wasting his time to send salutation after salutation whenever he wrote his epistles and sometimes nailing those to whom he gave greetings. We take this opportunity in the Chapel of the Open Book in the city of London. To send a Christian salutation to you who might be sitting alone in the far parts of the earth or in the crowded cities of the great continents elsewhere. We thank God that time and place do not interfere with the fellowship which we enjoy and the unity of the spirit that we have to keep. Well, now let us look at these two opening members of Colossians. I don't think time will permit me to read solidly right through, but I think we can see that these headings are according to fact. It opens Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God and Timotheus, our brother to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colossae grace be unto you and peace from God, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[00:05:08] And then after an interval, he finishes by referring to Epaphras. Verse seven, as he also learned of Epaphras, our dear fellow servant who is for you, a faithful minister of Christ, who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit. At least something leaps out to the I. He addresses these as faithful and he speaks of this epaphus as a faithful minister. Faithfulness has a tremendous place in the estimate of God. Now we turn to the last chapter just to see the way in which this epistle is rounded off. Verse 17 and 18 and say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord that thou fulfill it. The salutation by the hand of me. Paul Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. So there we have epaphus in the first chapter and we have archippus by name in the last. And salutations are sent to the beginning and salutations are sent at the end. Well, that rounds it off. You see, you've got a beginning at an end. You know that you've got a complete epistle. If you had a letter said to you and then you were looking, it seemed to end nowhere, You would say, Well, I miss something, but if it ends up yours very sincerely or whatever it is, with a signature as an end.

[00:06:42] So now we've got the beginning and the end. The next item is under a large subdivision. The letter B. And is subdivided by two small letters A and B when you run

your eye down, you see that they go in reverse order. B and A, That's often the case. Instead of being like that, they just balance out. A, b, b, a. We very often speak like that, although you may not be conscious. You're working out a structure when you're telling somebody something. You go down point by point. So should we now give that an attention? The first item has got a whole series of words. Verses 9 to 12 Wisdom, Spiritual understanding. Thanks. Pleasing and inheritance. Well, 9 to 12 won't occupy us very much in time. So shall we see whether that is so? Verse nine for this cause. We also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might according to his glorious power unto all patience and long suffering with joyfulness, giving thanks unto the Father which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

[00:08:11] Now we listed out those words, and if you run your eye down to the same letter, chapter 316 to 41, you'll discover they're all there. Chapter 316. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord and whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him. Then after speaking to wives and husbands, children and fathers and servants, the the in the servants particularly, we read servants obeying all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye service as men pleasers, but in singleness of heart fearing God. And whatsoever you do do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men. Knowing that the Lord Ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance for ye serve the Lord Christ. So we have, if you will notice in both cases, wisdom, spiritual understanding or spiritual songs. And the apostle is linked understanding with singing. Do you remember he said, I will sing with the Spirit, but I will sing with understanding also. So this is quite significant. And then we have giving thanks. In both cases we have the word pleasing in both cases and we have the inheritance. In one case it is an inheritance which is God's gift. The other it is an inheritance which has a reward.

[00:09:47] So there's not mere repetition, but an expansion of truth. Let's come back on our story and look at the letter B, small letter B, 13 to 23. Here we have a wonderful section, and the words there that stand out are the creator, the emphasis upon the

image, a reconciliation of things in heaven and earth, Christ in all, and the words forgive and the word holy. And then when we look down to the chapter three, verses 5 to 15, we have creation and the image and the reconciliation, the Jew and the Greek, instead of things in heaven and earth, Christ is all forgive and holy. Now that's either designed or accident, but the fact that they keep on doing this suggests design overruling. Shall we look at those two passages? 13 to 23 Chapter one Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and have translated us into the kingdom of His dear son, in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature? For by him were all things created that are in heaven, that are in earth visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created by him and for him. And he is before all things and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might have the preeminence.

[00:11:27] For it pleased the father that in him should all fullness dwell and having made peace through the blood of his cross by him to reconcile all things unto himself, by him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven, and you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works. Yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death to present you holy and unblameable and unretrievable in his sight. If he continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven, whereof I, Paul had made a minister. Some of these overlap just a wee little bit. You'll notice now we go to the corresponding section, uh, chapter three, and there you will find the image brought back again. The creation brought back again, this time to have a bearing upon individuals. Chapter three, Verse five. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth. And then presently it says that verse nine line up one to another, seeing that you put off the old man with his deeds and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.

[00:12:53] Now this begins to quicken your thoughts in chapter one. Christ is the image of the invisible God and He created all things. In chapter three, we have another creation, a new creation. And the image of God is still there. And so this is a subject which we shall have to pursue in detail as we come to it. In this. There is not a Greek

nor Jew circumcision, nor Uncircumcision barbarian Scythian bond nor free. But Christ is all and in all. So in the realm of creation, it was well pleasing that he should have preeminence, preeminence and in the new creation in relation to the Church and his people. Christ is all and in all. And we go on to verse 15 to complete this parallel. Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another. If any man have a quarrel you see in the first chapter, it's we have the forgiveness of sins from God. In the third chapter, what are you going to do about the forgiveness of sins one and another? You see out there as if you get the two. It's one thing to say we are freely forgiven all our trespasses by a gracious God and then emulate the man in the palace who, though he was forgiven much, took his fellow servant by the throat and said, Pay me what thou owest.

[00:14:37] So there's a point. Then you see it's beginning to balance. If any man have a quarrel against any even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all, these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. This morning, when we were dealing with the unity of the Spirit bound by the bond of peace, I reminded you that when Paul wrote Ephesians and said the bond of peace and wrote Colossians and said the bond of perfectness. He was saying practically the same thing to us. Peace and perfectness do not seem to be much the same. But if you know that Shalom is translated in the Old Testament to pay ox for ox to make amends for any trespass or wrongdoing, to give satisfaction. So you begin to realize that peace is not merely just quietness. But it's tackling something completely once and for all. That's the only peace that's possible. Anything else is a patch up, only to break out again. So he gives it two titles the bond of perfectness, the bond of peace, and let the peace of God rule in your hearts to the which also ye are called in one body and be ye thankful. Well, you'll find that in that section we have Christ. We have the creation, the image, the reconciliation. This time of Jew and Greek in the first in the first chapter.

[00:16:09] The reconciliation was, first of all, a things in earth and things in heaven are the last ones. And then it comes down to the Jew and the Greek, a small one. But that's just exactly what the scriptures teach. We are not to be merely taken up with a vast. We are to be taken also up with the individual reaction. And it keeps coming back. If you belong to a company which have been reconciled in this vast sense, surely there should be reconciliation between one member and another. Oh, but you say he's a Jew. Oh,

but you say, Oh, he's a Greek. But he says, What's that to do with it? All these distinctions have been blotted out and one new man has come into its place. So we have in verse 11, I repeated. The image of him that created him where there is neither Greek nor Jew circumcision, nor uncircumcision barbarian Scythian bond or free. It's Christ that matters. And Christ is all and in all. So now we go back again to chapter one, verse 23, reading on to chapter two, verse one. This comes under the next letter heading of Capital D, chapter 123. In this section, we have an emphasis upon the word the mystery manifested affliction in connection with it and the apostle desire to present every man perfect and that he agonized and he spoke about later this year. When I look down further with you at the same letter D, chapter four 2 to 13, we have an emphasis upon the word, the mystery manifest instead of the word affliction.

[00:17:58] We've got the word bonds as well. Do you object to that alteration? It's only two sides or one terrible story. Bonds. And in the first it's to present perfect. In the next case, it's to stand perfect. And then the man agonizes and he speaks about Laodicea evenly. Laodicea comes in, you see, twice. And one of the little items that give you a sort of a bit to peg down when you're starting to structure. There it is. There it is. So shall we read these two passages together? We go back to chapter 123. If you continue in the faith, grounded and settled and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you have heard and which was preached to every creature which is under him now, we start whereof I, Paul had made a minister. Here we have this special ministry coming forward who now rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for his body sake, which is the church whereof I am, made a minister according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you to fulfill. As we shall discover later, to complete the Word of God, even the mystery He is the mystery coming in, which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints, to whom God would make known.

[00:19:24] What is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, possibly Christ among you, the hope of glory, whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Where until I also labor striving according to his working which worketh in me mightily. For I would that he knew what great conflict I have for you. Here we have the emphasis, striving and working mightily and conflict which includes the word to agonize. To agonize. We're going to repeat it. And for them later this year, and

for as many as I've not seen my face in the flesh. Now, shall we test this out by coming over to the parallel passage? Chapter four, verse 2 to 13. Continue in prayer and watch in the same with Thanksgiving, with all praying also for us that God would open unto us a door of utterance. I have a feeling that the word door of utterance is strictly the door of the word. He is a man in prison. And a man who is a champion of liberty. And if you told me that Paul was satisfied and liked being in prison, I don't think you believe it yourself. But he was there and he accepted it as a part of the will of God.

[00:20:57] And when that man spoke about a door being opened for him, he didn't even mention setting him free from a literal prison. The door he was thinking about was a door of utterance. Whether he was in prison or outside, it didn't matter so much so long as the door through the word was still open. That's a spirit that we do well to emulate. So here we go on again with all praying also for us that God would open unto us a door of utterance, a door for the word to speak, the mystery of Christ, for which I also am in bonds, that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak. Do you see, he says, God has made the mystery manifest. It says so in chapter one. What he said at the end of the story. And if God's done it, that's all. But he said, it isn't all. God has made that mystery manifest to me, less than the least of all saints that I should enlighten others. God has stooped. To put this sacred thing into the earthen vessel of one man, Paul. God is not going to be independent of his redeemed children. Isn't it wonderful? So he says God has made the mystery manifest. Oh, God, give me grace that I may make it manifest. There's his echo. So we've got the two words coming together as I ought to speak.

[00:22:17] If you want to notice how the Apostle uses the word ought look it up, you'll find he speaks about what he ought to do far more times than he says. What you ought to do, That's a little less information of us, I suppose. He, the man who's always telling you what you ought to do is the man. I haven't said. The woman, of course, is the man who ought to tell himself a lot more what he ought to do. And perhaps his words would be with greater power if he only went that way. Walk in wisdom toward them that are without redeeming the time. You remember in the epistle to the Ephesians? He says, Redeeming the time because the days are evil. So they've got a. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt that ye may know how he ought to answer every man. You'll find there's an echo in the epistle to the Ephesians also. All my state shall tychicus declare unto you who is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose that He might

know your estate and comfort your hearts. Without it. He was a faithful and beloved brother who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here. So the Apostle didn't think it was a waste of time, not only to speak all about mystery and heavenly places and reconciliation, but to tell them about his state and his affairs.

[00:23:44] And he sent somebody to know your affairs and how you do. Don't be so high and mighty in your ideas that it's something that's beneath your notice. Always remember reading, and it helped me a little bit in those days when I read it of. Two missionaries right away in some unearthly place. Working the away for the Lord in this. I think someone in India or whatnot and they were rejoicing to receive a letter from their mother that at last she bought a shovel that was going to be useful in the old great they had in the kitchen. Now you say, surely those women out there in India would above all ideas of shoveling and coal and coke and grapes? No, they weren't. Blessed be God. It was a little word. They wanted to know. They were glad to hear it. So the apostle in Ephesians says, All my affairs and how I do, shall he make known unto you? All these things are a concern with God, our affairs and how we do. They should be a concern with us too. And we shall never lose the high and holy if we are concerned with those which are lowly as well. At the same time, we'll pick up our reading. Verse ten Aristarchus.

[00:25:01] My fellow prisoner saluted you and Marcus sister's son to Barnabas, touching whom ye have received commandments. If he come unto you, receive him. Now, this man has been emphasizing reconciliation. And you may remember that Sister Saint Barnabas caused a flare up. It's recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and Barnabas, who was Mark's uncle. He wanted to take him on a journey, but Mark had turned tail and given it up. He was afraid at the beginning, and he well might be if you knew the state of the country that they were going to enter. And Paul said, No, we can't take a man with us who turned tan and left us like that. But he didn't entertain it all. He the moment Mark began to manifest that he'd repented and was now standing all we received him back again, as you remember. And so he says, and Marcus sister said to Barnabas, category of his commandments, If we come unto you, receive him and Jesus, which is called justice. Who are the circumcision? These only are my fellow workers unto the Kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me. Epaphras Who is one of you? That is to say, he's a Gentile, most certainly a servant of Christ, saluted you, always laboring

fervently or striving fervently for you in prayers that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record that He hath a great zeal for you and for them that he may of this year and then in Hierapolis.

[00:26:34] So here we have again the word translated many ways, the originally the word to agonize. And he also uses the very name Laodicea. All these things become evident that although the Apostle wasn't artificially creating this structure, there was a superintending mind that was overruling his diction. Well, now that brings us then to the center of this epistle. Chapter 223. Chapter two. Oh, I'm sorry. Chapter two, Verses two and three. That their hearts might be comforted. He seems to emphasize this word comfort, if you remember both in connection with himself and others, the comfort of the scriptures is a part of their ministry, and we shouldn't be so dry in our teaching as to think that we are lowering the standard by realizing they have a comfort now, even as they lead us to glory then. But don't forget that sometimes the word comfort, even in English, means a lot more than a little baby's comforter. Divide the word comfort into two parts. C-o-m is the word together with and fought for is to strengthen, not merely soothe. You see, it's got a deeper meaning that their hearts might be comforted. Being knit together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God and of the Father and of Christ.

[00:28:09] When we examine this verse, we shall have to examine the alternative readings which make it read to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God. Then a dash. Christ like that. The mystery of God is Christ. If you want to know the mystery of God, you don't study mysteries. You study Christ. And the more you know him, you've got the answer. Eat her. Eat that one. I hid all the treasures. The thief forests. Have you got the copy of Roget's Thesaurus on your shelves? A wonderful analysis of the English language. It means a treasury. Well, here's a thesaurus. The treasury of wisdom and knowledge. So we have heat triggers. Then on the other side, in chapter three, verses 1 to 4, we have a heat life. If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ sitting on the right hand of God. Set your affection. And we were speaking during the dinner time of the word bent. I think I partly quoted Hamlet. They fool me to the top of my bent. This word of affection could be translated. A person's bent not merely something that he loved, but something that was his peculiar bent. I wonder whether people say, you know, Oh, so-and-so is peculiar. He's got a bent for the risen,

ascended sainted Christ. Wouldn't be a bad word if it were so. Would it change your affection on things above? Not on things on the earth.

[00:29:45] For you died. Not merely are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. So we have the two hidden things on either side. The center. The treasury hid the life hid. Then comes the center, dominated by the word beware. Verse eight 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. And then the reason why. For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. In him is all the treasury of wisdom and knowledge, and ye are complete in him. What utter fools we should be if we got all that in Christ. We turn to those empty systems which contain no water. That's the argument. Well, then he picks it up again presently and says verse 18, Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind and not holding the head. Earlier, he spoke about the traditions of men and the rudiments of the world. Now he speaks of them again and says in verse 20, wherefore if he be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why? As though living in the world are ye subject to ordinances? He says Why? As though living in the world were you are living in the world in one sense, but so far as God is concerned, are your relationship is concerned.

[00:31:29] You are written to have died with him and all the things that dominate the world and all its catches and its laws and its regulations, they leave you just unmoved. Some of the things which the world holds as most dear and most obvious, you have to pass by. What are the rules of the world if you want to get on in this world, is to look after number one. Well, you don't look after number one if you belong to this company. You have to remember you belong to a high and holy calling and a fellowship that looks after all the members as far as is humanly possible. And so the elements of the world begin to take a back seat and the mind of Christ begins to dominate instead. And so we have this stress upon the word beware. Well, that's just I haven't done much this afternoon. I know, but I've tried to pick out and show you that here's a pattern. Now, I propose to follow that pattern so that we'll be giving you the pattern. And then I'll go off on my own afterwards. Is it? So when we meet together next time, we shall then take the first section, the Salutation and the Ministry of Papyrus.

[00:32:40] I don't think we shall find. We've got enough there to occupy our whole time. And then we'll take it section by section and whether we can do all in one session or not, I don't know. I'm not pretending. We'll let the Word of God have its way with us. And I trust when we have given this epistle to the Colossians, the survey that the marvel of its teaching warrants. We ought to have a fuller and a more wonderful appreciation of the grace of God manifested to us in Christ. The glories of this high calling made known through Paul the Prisoner, and the perhaps better fitted and prepared to go out to tell others also. So once again, we bring our little study to a close. And as I said at the beginning, we are not only ministering the word to the folks who gather in the Chapel of the Open book, we trust that they are benefiting by it as well as you. But we are also thinking very, very much of those of you who are not so privileged to meet with us week by week. And we trust that you, together with us, will rejoice in the fact that in the chapel of the opened book, the book is being opened. May God bless us and all these activities leading us continually to realize that the dominating text of Colossians should be the one that dominates us. Also where Christ is all and in all.