

The American people are an amazing people. We are an innovative people, and we come up with inventions and new ideas that will blow your mind. I was so proud of our American ingenuity and resolve recently, when I saw the latest thing we had come up with. It is a great reminder of American resourcefulness and creativity, it is really a look into the future of where we are going as a country.

Image: KFC double stack

Yes, that is correct, you are looking at a sandwich with no buns. They have been replaced by two pieces of fried chicken. If you were here last week and you heard Gary's great sermon on Heaven and you are anxious to get there, then begin eating a doublestack every day. The doublestack really isn't a great picture of our culture's ingenuity and creativity, but honestly it does point to a deep-seated passion of our people. Blending things. Fusion. Mixing. Whatever you want to call it, we like to mix the best of both worlds. We love drawing from other inspiration and mixing it with our own. A little bit of this, a little bit of that. We have blended ice cream- vanilla is not good enough it needs chocolate swirls, pecans and carmel. We have blended cars- we have SUVs and cars, and then some that look a little bit like both. A little but of this, a little bit of that. We have blended houses with all different styles and design influence. We have blended entertainment, when you to a basketball game it is basketball, fireworks, and a rock concert. A little bit of this and a little bit of that. But on a deeper level, we blend as well. We try to mix the best of both worlds, the spiritual world of Christ with every competing religion, temptation, philosophy of this world. A little bit of this, a little bit of that. In every human heart lies the inclination to spiritually blend, fuse or mix. It is not out of the realm of possibility for one of us to show up to church on Sunday after sleeping with someone who is not out spouse. It is not out of the realm of possibility for us pursue Christ with our hearts but not our wallets. It is not out of the realm of possibility that we teach integrity to our children while we cheat on our taxes. It is not out of the realm of possibility for us to use the same set of eyeballs to read scripture and to peruse pornography for hours on end. A little bit of this, a little bit of that. A little bit of Christianity, a little bit of this world. A little bit of how Jesus lived his life, and a little bit of how my neighbor lives his life. When the message of Jesus Christ begins to be watered down by countless addendums. We can quickly become followers of Christ and also Oprah. We can find our spiritual knowledge in the Bible but also in the mega best seller the secret. We can put the principals of Christianity and the principals of capitalism on equal footing. It is in our nature to blend. Even when two competing ideas our polar opposites, it is within our human nature to blend them. Instead of following one wild messiah, we can mitigate his teachings and his calling by blending them with the best of what's around.

This isn't a new practice. There is nothing new under the sun. This is not an American issue, this is a human issue. And because it is a human issue, it is a church issue. From the first day of the church to the last, there will be competing narratives, competing religions, and competing philosophies. And the church of every generation must stand watch and keep guard against blending, against mixing, against fusion. The big word for this idea is syncretism. When two seemingly different religious philosophies are melded together. Specifically for us today, the fusion of Christianity with whatever the world has to offer- whether they are spiritual components or just the simple inclination pick and choose which parts of Christ's teaching we want to keep. A little bit of this, a little bit of that. The Apostle Paul was keenly aware of this issue of syncretism, and so he often stood against it. Truly at the root of syncretism is

idolatry. Our heart longs for someone else to give our affections to. We like the people of Israel follow God out of the desert only to cry out for the formation of a golden calf. We are a syncretistic people.

One such letter of Paul's is almost exclusively written against the backdrop of syncretism within the church, is his letter to the Colossians. All of Paul's letters are situational letters, meaning that Paul usually writes to address a certain situation. In Corinthians he is writing to address lapses in morality, in Timothy is writing to tell Timothy how to be a Pastor, in Galatians he is writing to address the dichotomy between law and grace, old and new covenant. And in Colossians, we find the key verse in 2:8

Colossians 2:8

An alien philosophy has infiltrated the church at Colossae. And they are mixing it with their Christian faith- a little bit of this, a little bit of that. While it is never clearly labeled or explained, it seems to be a mix of Jewish and Gnostic ideas. Gnosticism is a philosophy- not really a religion. Gnosis is a Greek word for knowledge. The Gnostic philosophy was very clear, the body was bad, the spirit was good. You must attain a special knowledge to find salvation. This usually took two paths- one where people pursued special knowledge and became ascetic. If the body is bad, then we must starve it of all its earthly cravings. The other path was people who pursued special knowledge and became libertines. If the body is bad, then it does not matter what we do with it, the spirit alone matters. Whatever the implications of it, this Gnostic philosophy was obsessed with knowledge. A special knowledge that you could pursue, and this alone would lead to your salvation.

The Colossian church began to synchronize themselves with this Gnostic philosophy. How do we know this? 1) first of all it is not specifically labeled, reading Colossians is like listening to one side of a phone call- you aren't sure what is going on, but you can figure it out. 2) In Colossians 2 he addresses Gnostic asceticism and says it has nothing to do with Christ 3) It seems Paul ironically countermands these Gnostic tendencies by employing their language- he speaks regularly about wisdom and knowledge.

So this is our backdrop for the coming weeks in this brief letter. A new philosophy, probably some blend of Judaism and Gnosticism is creeping into the church. Followers of Christ are becoming obsessed with deeper and more knowledge and it seems to be negatively affecting their walk with Christ. They are becoming knowledge gluttons that consumed wisdom but never put it into practice. They might know countless intricacies of Christianity, and yet it does not translate into daily living. Over the next few weeks we are going to see two major themes emerge 1) The call to put knowledge into action. Paul does not turn the Colossians away from knowledge, but he does counsel them to grow in knowledge so that, so that they grow, so that they bless others, so that they do good works. 2) The supremacy of Christ. Paul's antidote to religious syncretism is holding Christ up higher. Next week we are going to read an amazing hymn of praise, and Jesus is lifted even higher. What we will see in this is Paul doesn't spend the bulk of his time disproving the Judaizers or the Gnostics, instead he lifts Christ higher. I have heard this appropriately called expulsive affection. We can waste our time trying to weed out all of the bad or the sin in our life, but that quickly becomes sin management. Instead, the call of the Gospel is turn more and more of your affections on Christ. When you do this, it becomes and expulsive affection- it turns away the muck and mire, because this new obsession has replaced it.

Illus-I have shared it with you in this way. Diet. You can obsess all day about avoiding hamburgers, steering clear of pizza, running from Chocolate, but ultimately this will not lead to health. Your food affections have to change. The people who are successful on diet are the ones whose affection changes, they begin to like vegetables and grilled chicken. So much so, that it replaces their taste for unhealthy foods. This is an expulsive affection- the good thing is elevated and in the process the bad is expelled.

And so over the next few weeks we will see this idea of expulsive affection, as Paul lifts high the name of Christ, hoping to change the affections of the Colossian church.

This first week, we are going to focus on the theme of the call to put knowledge into action. With our understanding of the Gnostic context- the pursuit of knowledge, with no earthly benefit, we turn to Ch.

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Colossians 1:1-8

Paul is writing to the Colossian church, whom he has not met. He converted Epaphras, and he is leading them. Doubtless, Epaphras has written Paul for help, and now Paul as a person in authority is exhorting the Colossian church. He spends these first few verses in thanksgiving, and setting the tone for their mutual faith in Christ.

Colossians 9-14

Illus- Imagine with me if you will a church in Dallas that cancels church everytime over the whole course of the football season. Because of their deep abiding love for the Cowboys, they cancel worship services every Sunday to watch America's team. With that context in mind, my letter would come alive to you

Dear Dallas Church,

It has become clear to me that I must throw a penalty flag on your recent behavior. It seems you have been drawn offside in your passions of late. As your coach, I encourage you to go for the spiritual endzone by pursuing Christ faithfully as a community.

You can read between the lines here, that I am exhorting this church about their football obsession. So too, in this passage can we read between the lines. Paul is addressing the burgeoning Gnostic philosophy among them. The Gnostic's were obsessed with knowledge as the means to salvation. It was knowledge for nothing. The Christian church began to allow this syncretism into their community.

Listen specifically again in 9-11. Listen for those buzzwords of knowledge, wisdom, understanding. These are not used mistakenly- remember the context of the Gnosticism- this knowledge for nothing. They just want more knowledge- they don't have to be changed by it, or do anything with it. So Paul redeems this idea of knowledge, and calls them to knowledge in God so that...

Again, this is like listening in on one end of the phone call, but it seems clear this is the situation. Paul comes to a powerful truth- *the Christian life is lived through knowledge in action*. When you know you

go. When you go you know. There is an interrelated/ interdependent nature to the Gospel life. You cannot be obsessed with going deeper if you never do anything with your knowledge. Conversely you cannot be obsessed with action, getting out there and doing something, without a proper theological foundation.

Illus- Imagine two doctors. Both whose stated goal is saving lives. One who sits at his desk everyday obsessed with his manuals. He is intent on knowing every detail of every neurosis and pathology. He wants to know the human body to the point of perfection so that he can save lives. In the meantime, he sees no patients, and continues to acquire knowledge while people die in the streets. Conversely, imagine a doctor with limited to no training, but he becomes obsessed with action, getting out there and doing something. So he haphazardly works on as many people as he can, usually making things worse. He does this in the hopes of saving lives. Neither of these doctor's are succeeding in their calling.

Sadly many Christians are in a similar dilemma. All Christians have the calling to save lives. Some are obsessed with the manual, so they never make a lick of difference. Others want to get in the action, but they do so while being wildly misinformed and theologically infantile.

Paul says here- I pray for you to grow in knowledge SO that. He does not dismiss knowledge nor does he dismiss action. Rather he dismisses the false dichotomy of Gnosticism- that it is one or the other. Paul shows the interrelated and interdependent nature of our faith.

Pray that you grow in knowledge so that you may live a life worthy of Jesus, be pleasing to him, and bear fruit.

- i. When you know you go
 - A. Christianity is a faith full of tensions. It is evident from book to book, and it is evident within each book. We have grace and truth. Judgment and forgiveness. Encouragement and exhortation. The Christian faith is dogmatic in one sense. There are somethings that are clearly black and white, non-negotiable. The deity of Jesus. His atoning death on the cross. His literal resurrection. His call to make disciples. But then there are some things where are called to navigate a tension. We are called to be ok with both. We know we are saved by grace and we cannot earn it, yet we are called to pick up our crosses to follow Christ. We know we are to firmly exhort those who sin, and yet also regularly forgive them up to 70 x7 times. We know we are called to intentionally spread His gospel, but we know ultimately only God changes hearts.
 - B. The same is true in this dichotomy of knowledge and action. We are called to a Biblical understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ, and yet we know we will never fully understand the breadth of his work. We know that our righteousness is as filthy rags, and yet we are called to go into action for the Kingdom.
 - C. These ideas of knowledge and action are interrelated- when you know, you go. The more knowledge and depth you acquire in the scriptures should consistently deepen your desire for the lost. The more you know him, the more you will love the lost. You should grow more and more compassionate the more of God's character you

understand. The more you understand God's story, the more you should be compelled into action.

- D. However, there are countless Christians that have a fully formed Christology, Soteriology, Angelology and Eschatology- but all of their ologies won't even compel them to walk across the room and love their neighbor. All of their ologies won't change their affections or remove their addictions to substances or lifestyle choices. All of their ologies won't change their behavior or their love for others.
- E. Illus- This happens for a couple of reasons. I do not think we as Christians intentionally become spiritual gluttons. Sometimes we don't exercise our spiritual faith because we are afraid. But I think we also become spiritually gluttonous- all knowledge and no action, because we assume someone else will do it. Kitty Genovese story. Bystander effect. Diffusion of responsibility.
- F. The more you know, the more you should go. The greater grasp you have on the Kingdom, the more you should seek it out.
- G. Illus- A great picture of those who know but don't go is found in Jesus parable of the good Samaritan. It's really not that different from the story of Kitty Genovese. Good religious people, a priest and a Levite- with all the knowledge in the world, see this man beaten to the edge of death, and yet they keep strolling by. They notice him, and maybe they think someone else will stop to help. Or maybe they think it's not their job. Whatever the case. They don't go. And in this parable, those who know but don't go are reprimanded by Jesus.

II. When you go you know

- A. V.10b- So that you may please him in every way- by bearing fruit and growing in knowledge.
- B. The pendulum of knowledge and action, walk and talk swings back and forth in the church. In the late 19th and early 20th century, Walter Rauschenbusch paved the way for the social Gospel. Essentially he bifurcated the Gospel, into word and deeds, walk and talk, and overemphasized the deeds, the walk, the action. According to Rauschenbusch, the Gospel needed to be lived out, the poor must be cared for, the slave freed, and the hungry fed. These are all good things, but he promoted them at the exclusion of knowledge, at the exclusion of growing in Christ. In the mid-late 20th century the pendulum swung the other way as a conservative strain of Christianity began to emphasize scripture and the plan of salvation through an understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Again this is not a bad thing. But now the pendulum swung in such a way that the Gospel was again bifurcated, and the poor, hungry and downtrodden were excluded from the church's plan.
- C. Now we are seeing the pendulum swing once again in another direction. We are overcompensating for the lack of action by making some churches nothing more than glorified versions of the salvation army. My generation in many ways is becoming the

generation who loves to go but doesn't care about knowing. We are exceedingly altruistic, but it has little to do with our knowledge in faith.

- D. Our service is rendered meaningless if it is not anchored in Christ. We can feed countless stomachs, but if we do not offer them the body of Christ, we have missed the point. We can build countless habitat for humanity homes but if we do not offer them shelter in Jesus salvation, we have missed the point.
- E. The first part he says- when you know you go-I pray that you grow in knowledge so that you will live a life worthy of Jesus. And now he says- that you may live a life that is pleasing to him by good deeds and spiritual knowledge.
- F. Matthew 7- Jesus teaches on a good tree bearing fruit, and he says many will come to me after being very busy in my name, and I will say- get away from me, I never knew you.
- G. If we are merely philanthropic or altruistic, and we missed growing in our affection and knowledge of Him- then we have missed the point. Our number one priority in this life is not saving souls. Our number one priority is not going to church. Our number one priority is not feeding the hungry or housing the homeless. Our number one priority from Deuteronomy 6- love the Lord God with all that you are. Jesus is asked about this again in the NT- what is the greatest command- Love God with all that you are. Seek my Kingdom, and all else will follow.

Conclusion: Illus- I will be leaving for Metro's Boston mission trip this Tuesday. This will be our third trip. I will never forget another trip I made to Boston on a mission trip. We just got done from leading a community Bible camp, and we had shirts on that said the name of the church on the front and staff on the back. We went to a Harvard hamburger place, and they were getting a bit squirrely with us about the ticket at the end. I got up and began to delicately explain our point of view and how we were being wronged, and the guy didn't budge. I started to rare back to yell at this guy, and then I remembered- I am wearing a shirt with a Christian church's name on it, and on the back it says staff. I had forgotten whose name I was working for. If you go, and you forget your identity, or don't maintain a connection to your identity, then you have gone in vain. Many times we go forth with the name of Christ painted on our person, and yet we don't work according to him, for him or by him. It is easy to be altruistic but we have to know whose we are. We have to see ourselves as his possession, it will never be enough to do everything in the world for him, if we do not first and foremost know him and claim him.