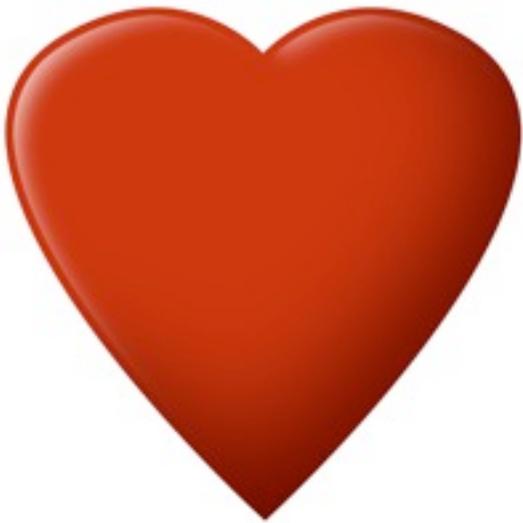


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# The Passion of a Pastor



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Message by Pastor Tom, Interim Lead Pastor  
Sunday Sermon for Sep 9, 2012  
Scripture Passage Colossians 1:28 – 2:5  
Vancouver Chinese Baptist Church Vancouver, Canada



Passion is a word that recently has become part of our common vocabulary. It used to be a word that you only heard around Valentine's Day; it was a word that had a romantic meaning.

Then you started to hear about the need for passion in our jobs (even executives talking about the need for passion) to engage in work with deep feeling. Skills by themselves were no longer sufficient. What we needed was passion in our work.

The movie from some years ago "THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST" brought the word before us again. That has to remind us that the word **PASSION** does not have its roots in the idea of really enjoying something and doing it with romantic feeling.

The root meaning of passion is to *suffer*. The passion of the Christ is really about the sufferings of Christ.

So when we talk about passion, we are really saying that we believe in something so much. We are so deeply committed to something that we feel the agony of it. We are willing to endure the pain of being involved in it.

The Apostle Paul was perhaps the best theologian the church has ever had. As a Jewish rabbi he was trained under Gamaliel. Paul had an outstanding mind and tremendous zeal for his religious heritage.

That was why he was such a zealot and assassin opposing the church, and God took the best of this spiritual passion and turned it around, focusing it towards the church. But he is more than a theologian with a great mind. He is a passionate pastor with a passionate heart. He thinks like a pastor, feels like a pastor, has a pastor's heart for the churches he started and works with. He rejoices when they rejoice. He is not afraid to scold them when they need scolded. He encourages them when that is what they need.

In one passage he describes himself as a spiritual midwife, coaching them as they are being formed into Christ.

#### Galatians 4

**19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed [morphed] in you,**

He moves for a few minutes from being a theologian, telling us about Christ, to being a pastor, telling us what his passion is.

**Col 1:28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.**

Then **inCross references:**

- A. Colossians 1:28 : Col 3:16
  - B. Colossians 1:28 : 1 Co 2:6, 7
  - C. Colossians 1:28 : Mt 5:48; Eph 5:27
  - D. Colossians 1:29 : 1 Co 15:10; 2 Co 11:23
  - E. Colossians 1:29 : Col 2:1
  - F. Colossians 1:29 : Eph 1:19; 3:7
- 1:29 – 5 strong words for work

**29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.**

There are 5 words for work in that verse. There is nothing casual about any of them. Every one of them gives the sense that this is demanding every ounce of effort and strength.

Struggling – Greek word is agony. I am agonizing for you.

#### Colossians 2

**1 I want you to know how much I am struggling [agonizing] for you and for**

**those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.**

Again the word for struggling is our word 'agony'.

It doesn't sound very appealing to say, I want to tell you about the agony of being a pastor! It would sound a lot better if we said the joy of being a pastor or the challenge of being a pastor. Can you imagine Carey theological School or Regent College or Southern Baptist Seminary advertising its programs for training in ministry and saying, come on and be a pastor, it's agony!

The word 'agony' comes from the idea of a gathering. Then athletic competition. Then it came to mean the striving involved. And then the energy that you are willing to expend in something because you are deeply committed to it. Think of the athletes in the recent Olympic Games in London. You see them putting every ounce of effort and strength into what they do. Why do they put themselves through this regime of training and effort? The answer is passion!

Every job/career has its struggles. One of our sons is in the RCMP. He and I have reached an understanding. I don't want his job and he doesn't want mine. Every career has its stresses and the ministry

does too. But after 44 years there are some unique joys and privileges in ministry with people that no other job has.

No one makes you do it. You have a passion for it. Your muscles may hurt. Your legs may get sore, but you would not do anything else.

We have pastors who have that kind of passion. I thought since we were talking about the passion of a pastor, it would be really important to hear from them.

[Q and A with Cindy and Johnny]

Here is some of my passion. It rises out of our passage this week.

**I HAVE A PASSION TO SEE VCBC GROW TO MATURITY AS CHRISTIANS.**

Here is the verse that describes that passion in my heart.

**Colossians 1:28**

**28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.**

Central to the ministry of the church must be the proclamation about Jesus Christ. We are here to raise up the name of Jesus in worship and in His Word because this

alone has life-transforming power to change people. People are not changed by programs or by mere activity. They are only changed by truth of Christ.

Paul says we do that in 2 ways. There are others, but we will look at these two.

Admonishing People. It means to warn. There are times to confront people with the truth of God's Word and what it declares so that they will change their lives. We do not live in the court of public opinion and simply do what everyone else does – we live before the Word of Christ.

In the church today we see a great deal of emphasis upon counseling. I realize that many people are helped through skilled counseling and I am grateful for those with those gifts. That is not my primary skill or gift. However, may I say with sensitivity and please do not misunderstand me or misquote me, listening to counseling is not a substitute for living in obedience.

1 Thess 5:14 – a mini-course in counseling.

**14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.**

Paul talks about the different ways to respond to different people at different times.

**Admonish or warn those who are idle.** He means morally lazy. There is a time to confront people, face them eyeball to eyeball and say, this is enough.

**Encourage the timid.** When people are apprehensive, hesitant, not sure which way to go, they need to be encouraged.

**Help the weak.** There are times when we find someone whose strength is gone. They are emotionally exhausted. Even physically spent. They need help to get back up on their feet.

Then a final phrase ties this all together. *Be patient with everyone* (the word is *marcothumia* — it is always used for patience with people)

There is a time to listen, a time to care, a time to come alongside. There is also a time to confront, to speak the truth in love. The issue may be moral, theological, relational, but we need to speak the truth to people. The fundamental deception of Satan is the lie that obedience to God will never bring happiness. The seduction is that happiness is to be found only in being liberated and doing whatever we want.

## Bonhoeffer – *Life Together*

“We admonish one another to go the way that Christ bids us to go. We are gentle and we are severe with one another for we both know God’s kindness and mercy. Why should we be afraid of one another since both of us only have God to fear? The practice of discipline in the congregation begins in the smallest circles. Where defection from God’s Word in doctrine or life imperils the family fellowship, and with it the whole congregation, the word of admonition and rebuke must be ventured. Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother [or sister] back from the path of sin.”

2 -- We also teach with wisdom

In both the OT and NT, wisdom is not intellectual knowledge. Rather it is taking the truth of God’s Word and putting it into practice in our day-to-day lives.

So we do not come to the Scriptures to get information. Information is easy. You just gather the facts. Rather we come to bring the truth of God’s Word with wisdom and apply it to our lives.

This is what changes us, and brings us step by step towards maturity.

Paul the pastor says, I want to present you to God as mature. We use this idea of presenting in a formal sense at a wedding when the MC says, may I present the bride and groom.

I have a passion to be able to say, God, I present VCBC to you, a mature church, people who are holy, without blemish and free from accusation. That kind of passion calls for hard work, so may I humbly echo with Pastor Paul. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

That means for me, I will bring all that I am. I cannot bring any more and I commit not to bring any less.

**I HAVE A PASSION FOR VCBC TO BE A LOVING COMMUNITY.**

## Colossians 2

**1 I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.**

**2 My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the**

**mystery of God, namely, Christ,**

**3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**

Some years ago I was lecturing for a week in a seminary in Regina. I went to a local church on the Sunday morning I was not preaching. I just went as a visitor. Everyone buzzed around like worker bees and talked to their friends. I stood in what they aptly called the fellowship hall. I stood all by myself. No one talked to me. Not a word! Fellowship did not happen. It was like I was invisible.

Imagine walking through the doors into VCBC for the first time. What do people think? Their first questions are not, I wonder what the doctrine of this church is one some obscure bit of theology. What they are really thinking is, what is uppermost in their minds is this, will anyone talk to me?

We genuinely want to see people come into church. We invite visitors to come and walking through that door for the first time will be the scariest thing they have done in their lives for months.

If we write in the bulletin that we welcome people, we need to back that up with words and acts of welcome. This Sunday, perhaps that means that you

don't just talk to your favorite people, seek out someone you don't know and talk with them for a few minutes.

My heart agonizes for us to be all that God wants us to be, a loving community of people, not just a lonely crowd gathered on a Sunday morning.

I have a passion to see us as a church encouraging one another and united in love. There is so much in our society that is discouraging. When we meet as the church, we need to know that we will be encouraged by being together. It is saying, I would not miss this gathering for one Sunday because when I go there, I get encouraged by all that we do together. Your small group encourages you the same way.

Any group of people can achieve almost anything when they are united in a common cause. Mothers who have lost children and family because of drunk drivers have found their common cause in MADD. Multitudes of other causes have been created. People band their energy and vision to save trees, save whales.

We do not have to create our cause. It has been created for us. It is the Kingdom of God. We do not have to find our commonality and place of cohesion. What binds us together. It is the cross of Christ.

We simply have to live it out, to join our hands and our lives in the greatest cause ever to come to the world.

Each of us holds a part of that responsibility. United in love means that all the little things that we do to irritate each other are not important. Love sees beyond them. Love means that we lay aside our own petty agendas and work together for the bigger cause which is the cause of Christ.

I have a passion for the church to be all that God wants it to be. I feel the agony when it is less than all it could be.

**I HAVE A PASSION TO SEE VCBC BE PEOPLE OF STRONG CONVICTIONS.**

**4 I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.**

**5 For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.**

2,000 years ago and again today, there are still people who are fast-talkers and also smooth-talkers, and if we are not well grounded and based in our faith, we will easily be swayed by their false logic. Some of them are on religious television. Some of them are in the pulpits of churches.

We are called to be people, men and women and young people who know their faith. Paul says we are to be orderly, a word from military precision, where you see soldiers marching in line. Then he says we are to be *firm* in our faith. This Greek word gives us our English word steroids. We have to be strong and stable in what we believe, not soft and mushy about what we have faith in. We are to develop solid Christian lives.

I hardly have words to tell you just how deeply I am committed to a strongly developed teaching ministry in a church such as VCBC. This means we will work on a balanced diet of spiritual truth, moving from Old Testament to New Testament, from Gospels to Epistles, through issues and needs, seeing that we will be well fed as a church.

But can I say this strongly to you? I plead with you, do not depend on me or any pastor on our pastoral staff to do your studying for you in God's Word. Do not depend only on the sermons each Sunday to feed you spiritually. Each of us is responsible for the development of our own spiritual lives.

R. C. Sproul – every Christian is a theologian ... to be an adequate Christian and competent in the things of God one must do

more than attend sharing sessions or bless me parties.

That does not mean that you have attended seminary, Carey Theological School or Regent College, but it does mean that each of us is responsible to do our own Biblical study, to develop what we believe for ourselves, to build up our own spiritual muscles. Every Sunday you should be able to line up the sermons from this pulpit with the Scriptures.

Like Pastor Paul, I agonize that as a church, we will not merely be swayed by what sounds good or easy, but we will be people of strong Christian convictions. We will develop the muscles of faith and firmness.

So here is what I would say to God this morning. My personal version of Colossians.

I stand here each Sunday to proclaim Jesus Christ, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present to God our Father everyone at VCBC mature in Christ.

My personal commitment: To this end I am willing to labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

I want you to know how much I am agonizing for you. My purpose is that you may be

encouraged in heart and united in love, so that you may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that you may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. I delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, perhaps at your baptism, I beg you, I plead with you, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

And finally as we begin this new season of fall ministry, I would say to God our Father how grateful I am that He has given us a church with such a strong history and heritage of faith. I am filled with thanksgiving. He has given us a church with a great ministry. I am thankful to God for the pastors who have passion for their work. I am thankful that God has entrusted us with the challenge of ministry right at the heart of the one of the greatest cities of the world. And I am deeply deeply thankful for each of you.

Thanks be to God!