

“Established In the Faith”

Colossians 2:6-15

If you have your Bible, I invite you to turn with me to Paul’s letter to the Colossians. This morning we are in chapter 2, and will read verses 6-15. Back in the early 1940s, there was a young man named Charles Templeton who was one of the most dynamic evangelists in America. He preached alongside Billy Graham in Youth for Christ rallies and filled auditoriums with thousands eager to hear the gospel. And a lot of people thought Charles Templeton, not Graham, would be the one God would use to shake the world. But over time, Charles Templeton began to doubt the authority of the Bible. He studied theology at Princeton and, instead of strengthening his faith, his confidence in the Word of God eroded. By the 1950s, he had completely rejected the Christian faith, declaring himself to be an agnostic. He even wrote a book entitled *Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith*.

Years later, journalist Lee Strobel interviewed Templeton for his book, *The Case for Faith*. And when Strobel asked him about Jesus, the aging Templeton grew quiet and said, “He was the greatest human being who has ever lived. He was a moral genius. His ethical sense was unique. He was the intrinsically wisest person that I’ve ever encountered in my life or in my readings. His commitment was total and led to His own death, much to the detriment of the world.” But no mention of the supernatural, no mention of the resurrection. With a tear running down his cheek, he said softly, “I miss Him.” It was a heartbreaking confession. Templeton died within a year of that interview at the age of 85.

What are we to make of those men and women who at one time in their lives openly professed faith in Jesus, only to walk away in unbelief? The Bible has a word for such a thing, and it is called ‘apostasy.’ Simply defined, apostasy is

turning away from the truth. To ‘apostatize’ is to walk away from the faith that you once openly confessed. One person has said that an apostate is one who has received light but not life. They claim to be Christian, but they are not. They know the truth and claim to have believed it, but abandon it for something else, thereby proving that they never truly believed.

1 John 2:19—“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”

An apostate is one who once said the right things, but their defection proves them to be false. Paul uses this word in 2 Thessalonians 2 to explain how a type of ‘apostasy’ will be widespread in the last days:

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4—“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

“Falling Away” —*Greek word is ἀποστασία (apostasia) and describes a defection from the truth*

In the last days, there will be many people who defect from the truth, who turn away from the truth, who renounce the truth they once claimed to believe. That’s apostasy. Much of the false teaching confronted by Paul and other writers in the New Testament was being spread by apostates who claimed to be Christians, but denied the basic truths of the gospel. Such were the false teachers in Colossae. They used the name of Jesus, but only to disguise their ideas which were not Christian at all. And the way for the church to be safeguarded against their ideas

was for them to be rooted and built up in Christ and established in their faith. So let's read what Paul says beginning in verse 6. (Read)

It is evident from chapter 2 that Paul greatly cares for the believers in Colossae, though he had never met them. His heart's desire comes through in his words, which illustrate for us the protective instincts of a shepherd.

Richard Phillips — *“Paul was a pastor writing to a church of recent converts under attack, who needed basic instruction. Here he provides answers to three vital questions: ‘What is a Christian? How do I grow spiritually? And how do I know that I am growing spiritually?’”*

His concern for them is that they remain steadfast in their faith, continuing to walk with Jesus just as they had from the beginning. His instruction in verse 6 to ‘walk in Him’ is the first imperative in the letter, and it could very well serve as the message of the entire book in three simple words. Paul explains in these verses that we never move away from the simple truth of the gospel. Though we grow in the gospel, we never grow out of it. Christianity is not Jesus plus something else. To be established in the faith requires:

1—A faith that is GROUNDED in His truth (2:6-7)

“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

To be rooted and built up in Him is to possess a faith that is grounded in the truth of Christ. The Colossians were under attack from those who taught that Jesus was insufficient for full spiritual knowledge. Instead, they needed to sample a smorgasbord of ideas—a little bit of pagan mysticism here, a little bit of Jewish

legalism there, sprinkle in some Greek intellectualism, and then they'll be on their way to spiritual knowledge. But to that Paul says, "No way!" Instead, he emphasizes how the believers are to walk in Christ just as they've received Christ.

The foundation of our faith

Notice here Paul defines a Christian as someone who has received Christ Jesus the Lord. The word 'received' that is used there is an aorist tense verb, which means it is action that has happened in the past. And it is indicative, which means that it is a simple statement of fact.

Billy Graham — *"No man can be said to be truly converted to Christ who has not bent his will to Christ. He may give intellectual assent to the claims of Christ and may have had emotional religious experiences; however, he is not truly converted until he has surrendered his will to Christ as Lord, Savior, and Master."*

It is evident in Acts that the apostles preached the Lordship of Christ. The word Savior occurs only twice in Acts (5:31, 13:23). On the other hand, it is amazing to notice the title 'Lord' is mentioned 92 times, 'Lord Jesus' 13 times, and the 'Lord Jesus Christ' 6 times. The gospel is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved."

The formation of our faith

Paul says in verse 6, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught." He describes a healthy Christian life through the use of three metaphors. Notice first that he describes it as a:

- A walk that has a specific direction

He says in verse 6, “As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.” Walk implies movement rather than stagnation. It implies direction rather than aimlessness. To walk with someone implies fellowship and intimacy.

Genesis 5:24—“Enoch walked with God.”

Micah 6:8—“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Christianity is about a daily relationship with God, keeping step with His Spirit (Gal. 5:25). Walking is ordinary and continual, not occasional or dramatic. There’s nothing flashy about it. The Bible never speaks of the Christian life a sprint or a leap. Rather, it is a steady, daily discipline of following Jesus. True discipleship is lived out moment by moment in the small, everyday decisions of life. As we’ve received Christ Jesus the Lord, we are to walk in Him. But then notice he mentions a second metaphor that involves:

- A tree that has a healthy root system

Notice he says that they are ‘rooted’ in Christ. He probably has the imagery of Psalm 1 in mind here, picturing them as trees whose roots go down deep into the enriching soil of Christ, thereby drawing from His life which was now living in them.

Kent Hughes — *“With trees a general rule is that the visible spread of the branches is roughly equal to the invisible spread of the roots. The deeper and more widespread our roots in Christ, the greater the shade, fruit, and beauty we provide.”*

The deeper our roots go into Christ, the more we branch out and bear fruit. That's why a sign of growth in believers' lives is that they will look for ways to serve, give, and get involved in the Master's mission. And then Paul mentions:

- A building that has a firm foundation

Christians are 'built up in Him' and 'established in the faith.' This language comes right out of the construction world in Paul's day. Buildings must have the right foundation upon which the right materials are then laid down.

1 Corinthians 3:9-11 — “You are God’s building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 2:4-6 — “As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.’”

In ancient construction, the cornerstone was the first and most important stone laid. It determined the position, alignment, and strength of the entire structure. Every other stone was measured and set in relation to it. And so the idea is that Jesus Christ is the foundation, the standard, the pattern for the entire church.

Ephesians 2:19-22 — “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of

God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

The apostles and prophets provided the foundation of teaching and revelation, but Christ Himself is the chief cornerstone who holds it all together. Without Him, the whole structure collapses. Which means the church is not built on personalities, traditions, or programs—it’s built on a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rooted, built up, established. Each of these are pictures that describe a growing faith. How does our faith muscles grow strong? The answer is through spiritual exercise. The Bible says that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ. That means those who seek a stronger faith will frequently be found with an open Bible, and they will consistently be seen sitting under sound and faithful preaching. The way to become secure against threats to our faith is to grow spiritually strong.

Paul says it this way in:

Ephesians 4:11-14—“And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the Faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

The fortification of our faith

Pay attention to the last phrase in verse 7, “abounding in thanksgiving.” As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Spiritual maturity in a believer’s life will manifest itself in a thankful attitude which in turn will fortify their faith against attack. Show me someone who is humbly grateful, and I’ll show you someone who is growing in Christ.

2—A mind that is GUARDED by His sufficiency (2:8-10)

“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority.”

Not only are we to possess a faith that is grounded in the truth of Christ, but notice how we must also have a mind that is guarded by the sufficiency of Christ. Faith that is grounded will keep us from minds which are deceived. That’s what Paul is saying here.

The warning to guard the mind

Verse 8 says, “See to it that no one takes you captive.” It is through their mind that believers are in danger of being led astray. Your mind is a battlefield where Satan launches his attacks against you. On a daily basis, whether we realize it or not, our thoughts are being shaped by forces which are both seen and unseen. Through the shows we watch, the social media we consume, and the conversations we have. Each of these experiences are having an impact on the

way we think and live. Our minds are constantly being molded and shaped whether we are aware of it or not. And the things we think about the most deeply will shape the type of people we become. Is it any wonder then the Bible places so much emphasis on our minds and our inner thought life? The Bible says in:

Proverbs 23:7—“For as he thinks in his heart so is he.”

Romans 12:2—“And do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

2 Corinthians 10:4-5—“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

We are not to be taken captive in our thinking, but are to take thoughts captive to Christ. Here in Colossians 2:8, Paul is warning believers against being taken captive in their thinking to false ideas. How might that happen?

The weapons that attack the mind

Specifically, Paul writes in verse 8 that believers must be on guard against being taken captive “by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.” The NLT says it this way: “Don’t let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ.” He’s talking about the baseless, worldly philosophies designed to confuse and deceive. Worldly philosophy and empty deceit refer to lost humanity’s attempt to find meaning and solutions to its

problems without the God of Scripture. Or the thinking that tries to co-opt Christian language and make a God after its own image.

How are people in danger today of being taken captive by worldly philosophy and empty deceit? A few ways are:

- Through secular ideologies that replace God's truth with human reasoning

The world elevates human wisdom above divine revelation. Worldly philosophies like relativism (truth is whatever you believe), humanism (man is the measure of all things), and naturalism (there is no supernatural reality) all lure people away from dependence on Scripture. And these systems may sound sophisticated, but deny the authority of Christ and the sufficiency of God's Word. In universities and the media, young people are told the lie that faith is irrational and morality is subjective. And without biblical grounding, many are 'taken captive' by ideas that appear intelligent but are spiritually bankrupt.

- Through deceptive cultural narratives about identity and purpose

Our world preaches that identity is found in self-expression, sexual preference, career success, or social status. These messages contradict the biblical truth that our identity is found in Christ (Col. 2:10). When people seek meaning apart from Him, they become enslaved to false definitions of who they are. Social media constantly tells people, "Be true to yourself," rather than "Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Christ" (Matt. 16:24). It sounds liberating but leads to bondage.

- Through the blending of Christianity with worldly thinking

Many today mix biblical truth with popular psychology, self-help messages, or political ideology. It produces a version of "Christianity" that uses Christian

language but lacks the gospel's transforming power. It's 'empty deceit' wrapped in religious vocabulary. People will try to quote the Bible when it is convenient, and they will try to make it fit their worldview. For example, the Bible says that we are to love our neighbor. This verse has been taken and applied to situations where we're expected now to affirm the lifestyle choices of other people. And to say anything otherwise isn't considered to be loving. Friends, that is empty deceit according to Paul.

- Through media and technology that shape our values

The entertainment we watch and social media we consume don't just inform, but they form our hearts and minds. Constant exposure to worldly values such as materialism, sensuality, and pride desensitizes us and normalizes what Scripture condemns. The result is captivity to worldly patterns of thought. It leads to moral and spiritual indifference so that many no longer actively resist those false ideas. Some will drift into captivity by apathy. When people stop discerning truth from error, they're easily swayed by whatever sounds nice. It is the midst which says, "Hey, it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere."

To all of this, Paul says, "Don't be taken captive by worldly philosophy and empty deceit which has its origins in human wisdom and the spiritual powers of this present world and not according to Christ." Such wisdom has as its source the satanic and demonic. The Bible says as much in:

James 3:15—“This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.”

It is not an overstatement to say that the world's pseudo wisdom originates with Satan and his demonic hosts. Recognizing this is half the battle!

The way to protect the mind

Look at the last phrase in verse 8 which says, “and not according to Christ.” Don’t be taken captive by worldly thinking and empty ideas which is according to human and demonic wisdom and not according to Christ. Which is to say that our thinking ought to be according to Christ. And the way to protect our mind is to bring every thought and idea captive to the obedience of Christ.

Why would anyone run after something else? Why would a believer ever think that he needs something in addition to what he already possesses? Verse 9 says of Christ, “For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” Jesus is all that God is in bodily form! He is God in human form, come to dwell with us, to reveal God to us. Verse 10, “And you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority.” In other words, you have all that you need in Him. You are complete in Him. Lloyd John Ogilvie said that Christians often get swept up in the philosophies and lies of the times because their emptiness has not been consciously filled with the fullness of Christ. Paul’s point here is that Christ’s fullness is what fills our emptiness. And why would we ever think that we need something other than Him? A third thing I’ll mention involves:

3—A heart that is GRATEFUL for His victory (2:11-15)

“In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it

to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him.”

To be rooted and built up in Christ is to possess a faith that is grounded in His truth, as well as a mind that is guarded by His sufficiency. But notice that it also involves a heart that is grateful for His victory. From verse 11 through verse 15, Paul uses indicative language which in Greek grammar states the facts or what is true. Imperative language calls for a response, or what believers should do. Here in these verses, Paul uses indicative language, emphasizing what God has already accomplished in Christ for believers, rather than what believers must do. And this is key—Paul grounds Christian living (imperatives) in Christian identity (indicatives). Beginning in verse 11, slowly go through the verses and underline each time you find the phrase ‘in Him’ or ‘with Him.’ And then underline phrases like ‘you were’ or ‘you have been.’ The point is that a believer is someone who has been brought into union with Christ and stands in His victory. And so from verse 11 through verse 15, Paul emphasizes the saving work of Jesus Christ and how the forgiveness of sins is personally applied to every believer.

Our spiritual transformation in Christ

Look at what Paul says in verse 11, “In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.” He’s referring to the Old Testament here and the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, and is using it to illustrate what God has accomplished for them in Christ. More than likely, the false teachers had been claiming that they needed the Old Testament ritual in addition to their faith in Jesus. But Paul is countering that by saying they have all they need already in Christ. Ritualism doesn’t do anything. Verse 12 says, “Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of

God, who raised Him from the dead.” In other words, all they needed for spiritual transformation had already been supplied through their union with Christ. It is not about what they do, but what Jesus has done!

Our complete forgiveness in Christ

Notice Paul says in verse 13, “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses...” We were dead in our sin, but God made us alive together with Christ. And He has forgiven us of all our trespasses! How did He do it? Verse 14, “by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross.” That word that is translated as ‘canceling’ in verse 14 is one of the richest words in the New Testament and helps unpack the heart of Paul’s imagery of salvation.

“Canceling” —the Greek word *ἐξαλείφω* (*exaleiphō*) literally means to wipe out, erase, or blot out; combines *ek* (out) and *aleiphō* (to smear, wipe, or anoint) and carries the image of completely wiping something away until no trace remains

In ancient times, when someone needed to borrow money or anything else, a list was made and the person signed it, as it was a legal debt. According to Paul, our debt before God was immeasurable. Our failure to obey His law and our sinful behavior incur a debt against Him. But the Lord Jesus took those demands that were against us, and He wiped them out by nailing them to the cross and forgave us everything!

Colossians 2:14 (J.B. Phillips)—“He has forgiven you all your sins: Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which hung always over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it over His own head on the cross.”

Kent Hughes — *“Martin Luther experienced the reality of this truth in a dream in which he was visited at night by Satan, who brought him a record of his own life, written with his own hand. The tempter said to him, ‘Is that true, did you write it?’ The poor terrified Luther had to confess it was all true. Scroll after scroll was unrolled, and the same confession was wrung from him again and again and again. At length the Evil One prepared to take his leave, having brought Luther down to the lowest depths of abject misery. Suddenly, Luther turned to the Devil and said, ‘It is true, every word of it, but write across it all: ‘The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sins.’”*

Our total triumph in Christ

Verse 15 says, “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him.” Paul invokes the image of a victorious general leading a procession, parading his conquered enemies in shackles to humiliate them in their defeat. It is a picture from ancient Rome, when a general won a great victory, all of Rome celebrated with what was called a ‘triumph.’ The general rode through the city streets in a golden chariot. Behind him came his victorious soldiers, the spoils of war, and the defeated enemies in chains. The air was filled with incense and cheers—it was a parade of total victory.

William Barclay — *“In a Triumph, the procession of the victorious general marched through the streets of Rome to the Capitol in the following order. First came the state officials and the senate. Then came the trumpeters. Behind them came those carrying the spoils taken from conquered land...Walking behind all these were the captive princes, leaders and generals in chains...Then came the officers who attended the magistrates, the lictors bearing their rods, followed by the musicians with their lyres; then the priests swinging their censers with the sweet-smelling incense burning in them. After than came the general himself.*

He stood in a chariot drawn by four horses...After him rose his family, and finally came the army wearing all their decorations and shouting their cry of triumph.”

Paul uses that same imagery to describe what Jesus has accomplished at the cross. When He died and rose again, He didn't just survive the battle—He won it decisively. He disarmed Satan, stripped the demonic powers of their authority, and marched them in His victory parade. So that now as believers, we are not prisoners of defeat. Rather, we are participants in His triumphal procession. Jesus is the conquering King of Kings, and He's leading us in His victory parade every day we walk with Him.

2 Corinthians 2:14—“But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.”

After World War II ended, a Japanese soldier named Hiroo Onoda stayed hidden in the jungles of the Philippines for almost 30 years. He refused to believe the war was over. He lived as if the battle still raged—until his old commander finally came to tell him, “The war ended a long time ago.”

Many Christians live the same way, still fighting battles that Jesus has already won. Still carrying around guilt Christ has already forgiven, still fearing powers Christ has already disarmed, still trying to secure victory in their own futile and powerless efforts. I love these lyrics by Shane & Shane:

*I'm fighting a battle You've already won
No matter what comes my way, I will overcome
I don't know what You're doing, but I know what You've done
I'm fighting a battle You've already won!*

That's the gospel! Friend, the Bible says, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in the cross." The war is over. The victory is complete. And Jesus Christ leads us in triumph—we just need to walk in it! That's what Paul wants these Colossians to understand, and it is the same thing that you and I must understand if we are to be rooted and built up in Christ. A faith that is grounded in His truth. A mind that is guarded by His sufficiency. And a heart that is grateful for His victory. This is what it means to be established in the faith!