

New Now

3. *Deeply-rooted*
January 22, 2023

Text: Colossians 2:4-23 [6-7]

Welcome to Week 3 of our series New Now. Please turn to Colossians 2 in your app or Bible.

Most children don't fully realize how concerned their parents get about them. Okay, parents worry. Some parents at the bus stop on the first day of kindergarten have to hold back their tears as they send their little ones off to a new environment for the first time. They realize they are no longer the only influence on their children. Some parents get concerned about the influence of social media, friends, or even Covid disruptions on their school-aged children. Other parents get tense or choke up as they prepare to send their high school graduates off to college. They know their kids are going to encounter the world in a new way – new ideas, new influences – and sometimes parents wonder how that will affect their kids. Will they be able to handle the stress of classes, emotional adjustments, or peer pressure? How will it change them?

If you have ever been concerned about the influences your kids face, you know how the Apostle Paul felt about the Christians at Colossae. After all, he was a spiritual father to the early Christians. Paul heard about a church in Colossae which was started by a friend of his named Epaphras. So, Paul wrote a letter to them, which is the book of Colossians in our Bibles.

In chapter 2, he lets them know that he is happy to hear they are following Jesus, and also that he is concerned about them, too. **Colossians 2:5** *For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.* Paul is delighted that the Colossians have a solid faith. At the same time, a few verses earlier he says -- **Colossians 2:1** *I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not met me personally.* The New Living Translation says *I want you to know how much I have agonized for you.* It's a little unusual to tell people you've never met that you are contending for them or agonizing for them. Why did he feel that way? Because he knew that not all who start out following Jesus continue, and that the world the Colossians lived in was a spiritually hostile environment. Forces of all kinds came against their faith every day, and Paul did not want to see them revert back to their old lives or go offtrack. He wanted to see their new life grow and flourish, not wither and evaporate. So, he was both happy and concerned about them.

As a pastor, I know the feeling. Over the years, I have seen many people receive new life in Christ at Crossroads and go on to thrive spiritually. Jordan Grogan is a graduate of Crossroads preschool and grew in the student ministry and today serves as our Director of Operations at Crossroads. My wife Linda taught Chelsea Gaab. She was a first grader in Kidzone, and today Chelsea is doing a great job leading our entire Children's Ministry. Rachel Swihart and Andrew Belko found new life in Christ here at Crossroads, and now they are Region Pastors. Many of our Board members came to Christ here and have grown and matured to be spiritual leaders. That always moves

me. Today when I see new members and people starting Following Jesus class, I am delighted and look forward to seeing what God will do in their lives.

And yet I also remember others who started out following Jesus here then gave in to the spiritual headwinds and faded back into the world. Some were enthusiastic at the beginning. But today they are not interested in pursuing Jesus. You might know some people who used to follow Jesus, but today they no longer press in to know him. They don't worship regularly or connect with other believers or serve him. That's because you and I live in a spiritually hostile environment, too. The world in which we live can take a toll on our new life in Christ if we are unequipped to handle it. But that doesn't have to be our story. We can thrive and grow spiritually, no matter what kind of environment we live in. Paul gives the Colossians the key to spiritual maturity that lasts. *So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. Colossians 2:6-7* To continue to live in Christ Jesus, we need to be **rooted** in Christ. Roots anchor a plant.

A series of severe storms have hammered California in recent weeks. [Photo shown on the screen.] The ground is so saturated with water that the roots of trees have nothing but mud to hang onto. So, when the storms' winds hit 60 mph, the trees toppled by the thousands.

Just as the roots of a tree anchor it, the roots of our lives need to sink deep into Jesus to anchor us when we face life's headwinds. Roots absorb water and nutrients and send them to the plant. To be rooted in Jesus means we draw life and strength from him. Deep roots make healthy, sturdy plants. When we have deep roots in Jesus, our lives are "built up, strengthened, and overflow with thanksgiving." We need to be rooted in Jesus, not a certain philosophy, worship style, or opinion. They won't anchor or nourish us. Only staying rooted in the person of Jesus will allow us to thrive.

Then Paul goes on to point out two forces which work against us staying rooted in Jesus, and how we are to handle them. First, **to stay rooted in Jesus -- Absorb God's truth.** The first spiritually hostile force Paul identifies is a philosophy that excludes Jesus. *Verse 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.*

In the Colossians' day, people viewed Christianity as just one of many philosophies that floated around the Roman world. Today, it's easy for people to see Christianity as just another set of beliefs that is no different than any other. But we don't follow a set of beliefs. We follow the living Lord Jesus. Doctrine is important, but our understanding of it can shift. We are not rooted in doctrine. We are rooted in Christ. That's why we teach healing prayer and prophetic prayer. Signs and wonders point to the reality of Jesus alive today.

I was talking with an agnostic guy who was dismissing the message of the Gospel, so I pulled out my phone and showed him a video of a woman I knew sharing how God restored her hearing after she was prayed for. I said, "If there is no God, how do you explain that she couldn't hear, then someone prayed for her in Jesus' name, and instantly she could hear normally?" He couldn't, but the point is that that moved the discussion out theoretical debate and into the realm of encountering the living Jesus.

See to it. Don't let someone argue you into basing your life on something other than the resurrected Jesus. Paul never tells us to turn our minds off or to stop thinking. This verse is not against learning or all philosophy. After all, Paul was highly educated. It was why he could debate philosophers in Athens or Jews in Jerusalem. He is speaking against "hollow, deceptive philosophy." Hollow means there is nothing inside the empty shell. Specifically we're told to avoid -- *philosophy which depends on... human tradition.*" We're not to base our lives on ideas that are based on nothing other than human opinion.

I was at dinner last month when the question of sexual morality came up. I asked what I usually do -- "How do you know anything is right or wrong? On what basis?" Their answer was, "whatever doesn't hurt anyone." I answered that is changeable and subjective. I started with the premise that God is real, and he determines objective moral code. We'll stay rooted in Christ when we let God's truth guide us rather than changing human preferences.

"Philosophy which depends on....the elemental spiritual forces of this world."

The culture in which we live gives us messages every day that are opposed to ways of Jesus. We are enticed with materialism instead of seeking first the Kingdom of God. We are encouraged to define ourselves by terms like conservative or liberal or see ourselves in terms of a sexual identity instead of identity in Christ. We are told we deserve pleasure and that it is unhealthy not to give in to our desires. To stay rooted in Christ is to ignore those false values and adhere to God's ways.

To stay rooted in Jesus, **tend my inner life.** Colossian Christ-followers had responded to the good news of the Gospel. Then others came in and taught that we have to follow certain rules in order to be accepted by God. That is called legalism, and Paul warned the Colossians against it. In verses 11-15, Paul reminds them of the good news of the Gospel, then he says in verses 16-17 *Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Colossians 2:16-17.*

Paul is reminding the Colossians that they are right with God not by avoiding certain foods or worshipping on special days. We know God through Christ. Other Jewish and pagan teachers told them they needed to follow strict rules to please God. *"Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. Colossians 2:21-22* Human rules won't keep us rooted in Christ. They root us in our performance. That steals life, it doesn't give it. Yes, God has given us commands to follow to keep us from damaging ourselves, others, or our relationship with God. But we humans seem to have a tendency to add other rules of our own.

Last week I was training leaders in Missouri when a young man stood up and started exhorting the group to be holy. He said, "If you use an app instead of a paper Bible, you are not set apart from the world and not holy." That is a great example of a human command that Paul warned us against. I love my paper Bible. But I have also met with God reading and listening to my Bible app.

Paul says legalistic rules are "Destined to perish with use." When manmade rules change and go in and out of style, but worse, they don't even work in changing our behavior -- *²³ Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-*

imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. Colossians 2:23

The irony is that keeping a lot of strict, manmade rules can look impressive. But it doesn't work because rules don't change us inwardly. Using a paper Bible instead of an app won't make me more acceptable to God. It won't make me more like Jesus in my character. Legalism might modify external behavior, but it doesn't touch the heart's motives or desires. It's like putting on a pilot's uniform and hanging around the cockpit while not being trained to fly a plane. You look the part, but the inner reality isn't there.

Legalism can never make us acceptable to God because it deals only with externals. It attempts to weed the yard by clipping off the plant tops. Not only will the weeds resurface, but the roots will also keep spreading underground to sprout in another location. **If we measure our spiritual maturity in terms of rule-keeping, we will become either prideful or depressed.** We will not become like Jesus either through legalism (or by breaking his commands.) Legalistic rules "lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence." Focusing on manmade rules and laws will make it more likely that we will lose our passion for Jesus over the long haul. Instead of legalism or empty philosophy, stay rooted in the person of Jesus. Lean into getting to know him, to hear from him, to do life with him. Here is one routine that will help with this -- **Be brutally honest with Jesus.**

Yes, it is important to worship, to read the Bible, and to pray. Not as religious exercises that will make God like you. He already loves you enough to die for you. He isn't looking for you to log religious time. He just likes being with you. So the point is not performing those tasks, it's to worship and pray in honest ways with him. To stay rooted in Christ, we need to connect with him from the heart. Yes, pray, but not just because you should. Pray because we need to communicate with Jesus. And tell him everything. I mean everything. Be brutally honest with him about the desires of your heart. If you don't feel like praying, you can tell him that! Then ask for his help. If you are feeling angry or cold toward your spouse, tell him that. If you don't want to obey what you know he is saying, tell him that and ask him to change your heart. Instinctively, we may feel like telling God what we think he wants to hear or what prayer should sound like. That will result in a shallow relationship with him. We want to be deeply rooted, so be brutally honest. Tell him.

When you worship, be real with him. If you love him – show it! Sing like no one is listening but God. If you don't feel like worshiping, you can tell him that, and then ask him to help you be the worshipper you want to be. Be honest and expressive in your worship with him. In Following Jesus class, we'll help you learn how to connect with God in prayer and scripture. So sign up now if you haven't already.

Anyone following Jesus will face some headwinds of resistance, but we can stay deeply rooted and stand strong when we are honest with Jesus. Let's take a moment to be honest with him right now.

[Prayer]