

## Spiritual Maturity: A Heart Firm in Christ Colossians 2:4-5

### Intro:

- **Illst:** Have you ever been fooled by satirical news on the Internet or some social media website.
  - How do you keep from being sucked in? You have to know the truth. Well, when it comes to the daily news who knows what is true but when it comes to the truth of God's good news in Jesus Christ you have to know the Truth (with a capital T)
  - You have to pursue the truth and continually go back to the truth. We must be grounded in the truth and that is the gospel.
- **Over the next few sermons in Colossians we are unpacking Paul's purpose in ministry—to present everyone mature in Christ. By looking at his purpose we are answering the question: what does growth in spiritual maturity look like? What are evidences of it in our lives? What are the marks of spiritual growth?**
- **On May 14** we looked at **Colossians 2:1-3** and said that spiritual maturity is a heart that strives to connect the saints to the riches of Christ.
- **This morning we are going to see that another mark of spiritual maturity. Main point:** A spiritually maturing heart is, by faith, firmly grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Verses 4-5 identify two marks of growth in the gospel or growth in spiritual maturity.
  1. **Warning: Firmly guard the truth of the gospel**
  2. **Be Intentional: Firmly ground your faith in the gospel**

### I. **Warning: Firmly guard the truth of the gospel (v. 4)**

- *"I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments."* ESV
- **F. F. Bruce, "What I mean to say is this: let no one lead you astray with persuasive talk."<sup>1</sup>**
- **Here is what we find at the beginning of v. 4. It is Paul re-iterating his purpose in ministry but it sounds a bit different.** He had previously said his purpose was to toil, struggle, to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ and the sound doctrine that goes with it in order to present everyone mature in Christ. Now he states it in the negative by giving us a warning. This is because we have an enemy that is competing for our hearts and he is teaching false doctrine, a false gospel and a different Jesus. He makes it sound good.
- Paul is about to deal with the false teachers and their corrupt doctrine directly. So . . . here is why it is so important to have a heart that is by faith firmly guarded and grounded in the gospel—we have an enemy—the devil. He is real and he is on the prowl seeking someone to devour in order to destroy his or her life.
- **In our modern age, we tend to not think about the devil** much or if we do we conceptualize him wrongly. We tend to reduced him to some crazy entity in a horror movie or a cartoon. In reality he is neither but in reality he is subtle and cunning. His goal is to keep people believing he does not exist.
- **Many modern people tend to speak of "evil" as a principle or a force** because it is not proper or educated to think of a personal devil that is on the attack. Yet this is not consistent with the Bible.
- The Word of God identifies a person called the devil or Satan and he does have forces of evil under his command and they do attack the people of God and seek to destroy them. He is a defeated foe but he is still a formidable foe that can wreak havoc in the lives of people and the church.

---

<sup>1</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and the Ephesians*, p. 92.

- **So in v. 4, the Apostle is giving us an over view of the schemes of our enemy**, that serpent of old. In these verses Paul prepares us for the false teachings that he will address in greater detail later in the letter.
- **Verse 4 sounds like they are back in the Garden of Eden.** It was in the Garden, at the very beginning of creation, where the word of God was called into question by a *plausible argument*. This phrase “*plausible argument*” might be better-translated “*fine sounding speech*” or “*beguiling speech*”. It was a seemly logical argument by the serpent, the devil, which called God’s word into question and Adam and Eve believed it and sinned against God by eating from The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.
  - You can almost hear our enemies beguiling words in v. 4, “*Did God really say . . .*”
  - Since then we have had deceptive, fine sounding speech competing for our hearts.
- **Principle: Growth in spiritual maturity means growth in the truth of the word of God and growth in the truth will guard our hearts.** We must heed the warning the Holy Spirit is giving us through the Apostle.
- **First—notice who Paul addressed in Colossians 2. (the false teachers and their doctrine)**
  - “no one”: v. 4, v. 8, v. 16, v. 18
  - “elemental spirits of the world”: v. 8, v. 15, v. 20
  - **In Ephesians 6:11**, Paul talks about how the church and Christians face the “*schemes of the devil.*” Your translation might read, “*the wiles of the devil.*”
  - Behind the false teachers and their doctrine is Satan, his demons and their plans to try to corrupt the truth of the gospel and cause the church to be ineffective.
- **Second . . . Paul identified how they were trying to deceive the church (cf. v. 23)**
  - **The devil is an expert in instigating false teaching.**
    - **1 Timothy 4:1-2**, “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and **teachings** of demons, <sup>2</sup> through the **insincerity of liars**.<sup>2</sup>”*
  - **You need to understand this**—these plausible arguments will sound good to us, they seem to make sense **BUT** they are a distortion and corruption of the person and work of Jesus—the gospel.
  - **They are fine sounding, super spiritual, gospel-distorting arguments.** They don’t necessarily object to the gospel, they just change it enough to make you think you are believing almost the gospel when you are not really believing the gospel at all.
  - **In the Garden**, the serpent didn’t say there was no God, he simple twisted the words of God enough that it sounded almost the same as what God had said. Adam and Eve thought it was plausible.
  - **The purpose of the false teachers is to lead Christians astray.** They want to harm the church and destabilize their faith in Christ and therefore making them ineffective, joyless and centered on everything else except the gospel of Jesus Christ.
  - **Here is their purpose, look in v. 23 (read)** . . . these arguments give the appearance of wisdom because they sound religious and say they have to goal to help a Christian grow spiritually by becoming more like Jesus and therefore killing the old fleshly, sinful man.

---

<sup>2</sup> They are telling lies on top of lies.

**They don't say: "Let me teach you how to rebel against God."** No . . . they say, "Let me show you how to follow Christ even closer than you ever could have dreamed."

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount said, "Wide the way of destruction but narrow is the path to life." But here is what you need to realize, the sign above the wide road does not say Hell . . . it says—This way to Heaven. So we need the treasures of knowledge, wisdom and understanding that v. 3 talks about to help us know when we are being fed a plausible argument.

#### Application:

- **What are some of these plausible arguments we hear today? Arguments that twist the gospel just enough to make you think you are really following Christ but in reality you are not?**
  - **Now here is where I usually get in trouble because I name groups that distort the gospel.** Part of my responsibility as a pastor and elder is to guard the flock by keeping a watch on our doctrine.
  - 1. **Prosperity Gospel: this is a false gospel.** This distortion of the gospel is one that is wreaking havoc worldwide.
    - **Definition:** The Abrahamic covenant, Jesus' atonement, giving offerings, faith as a self-generated force and prayer are all means to material entitlement.<sup>3</sup>
    - Some of the main teachers of the prosperity gospel are Kenneth Copeland, Joel Olsteen, Creflo Dollar, Benny Hin and John Hagie.
    - What sounds plausible and therefore confusing about these kinds of teachers is that these men proclaim Jesus, talk about sin, they use the Bible or quote Scripture (misuse Scripture) and they may even say they do works of power. They may use the same vocabulary we use but they have a different dictionary. They believe wrong things about the Bible, do not believe all the Bible, do not let Scripture interpret Scripture, they preach a different Jesus and a different understanding of the person and work of Jesus.
    - The prosperity gospel is not Christianity. It is a false gospel.
  - 2. **Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD):** This is probably that one that is doing the most damage in the West and really the US church. MTD is a term that was coined by Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton based on their research that examined the religious beliefs of teenagers. However, further work has revealed that the belief system of MTD is not just a problem with teenagers but also young adults and it is also being taught in many Evangelical churches.
    - **Definition:** A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth. He wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when He is needed to resolve a problem. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself and if you are then you go to heaven when they die.<sup>4</sup>
    - The Evangelical church in the US is steadily becoming built around these doctrines. You can go in these churches and ethics are taught and the word "gospel" is mentioned but never explained. Songs are sung that praise God and mention Jesus but the specifics of the person and work of Christ are absent.
    - **Rainbow colored flags are hung out in front of these buildings** proclaiming that we are all one no matter what we believe. Love wins and everyone eventually goes to heaven.

<sup>3</sup> [www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-errors-of-the-prosperity-gospel/](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-errors-of-the-prosperity-gospel/).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/04/11/moralistic-therapeutic-deism-the-new-american-religion-2/>. <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/trevinwax/2016/10/12/churches-reaching-millennials-causes-for-celebration-and-concern/>. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moralistic\\_therapeutic\\_deism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moralistic_therapeutic_deism).

- **These are churches where the gospel is assumed but never explained.** They may use the word gospel but it is a different gospel.
- The Prosperity Gospel and MTD are probably the two most deceptive that are being taught today.

### 3. **Mormons & Jehovah's Witnesses are the two standard heresies.**

- I am not going to spend much time on these two because they are very old heresies.
- These two cults are easily recognized because of their distortion of the doctrine of the Trinity and person and work of Jesus.
- Groups that deny the doctrine of Trinity are not Christian because in order to do this they must redefine who Jesus is. When you redefine Jesus by making Him an altogether different god, make Him a demi-god or reduce him to simply a man you distort the gospel and the power of the gospel to save.

### 4. **What is it that will guard our hearts as Christians? The answer is two-fold:**

- **The first part of guarding is found in the warning (the negative) concerning false teachers and their spiritually appealing and yet beguiling arguments in v. 4.** The alarm has sounded, the attack is imminent but run for shelter in the truth of God's word, in the gospel then go on the offensive and take the attack to those who have yet to believe.

## II. **Be Intentional: Firmly ground your faith in the gospel (v. 5)**

- *"For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ."*
- **Let's go back to what Paul said at the beginning of v. 4,** *"I say this . . ."* Now we need to ask the question, *"What had Paul said?"* To answer that question we must look at:
  - **Colossians 2:2-3**
  - **Colossians 1:24-28**
  - **Colossians 1:15-20 (confession, creed, hymn, poem)**
  - He had been teaching them about the person and work of Christ. This is what would ground their faith in the gospel and why he says he is rejoicing.
- **Next notice what he says in v. 5,** *"For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see . . ."*
  - **First he rejoiced because of how the firmness of their faith resulted in unity of spirit in Christ:** *"For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see . . ."* To see what? Their good order and firm faith and this was the occasion for his rejoicing in the Spirit. This was both rejoicing in the Holy Spirit and rejoicing in their common spirit of being united in Christ.

**He was NOT just saying that they were *in his thoughts and prayers*.** NO he rejoiced to see their good order and firmness of their faith in Christ in and even though he was not with them face-to-face he felt a profound sense of unity with them through the Holy Spirit. Our union with Christ gives us union with other believers and this is a work of the Holy Spirit.
  - **Second reason he rejoiced because of their firmness of their faith in Christ**
    - He says in v. 5 that he rejoiced to *see their "good order" and the "firmness of their faith."* The Greek words *order* and *firmness*, were often used in military context to describe the discipline and strength of the troops. So . . . it seems logical to conclude that Paul is talking about how we are to be strong and disciplined in our ability to believe.

- **But that is not what he means.** A closer translation might read that Paul *rejoiced to see the good order and firmness of their faith that had been given to them and belonged to them.* The thrust of the Greek language is that their faith was a gift. They had been given the *TRUTH of the gospel and it is POWERFUL.*
  - Paul said in **Ephesians 2:8-9** they have been saved by grace through faith and that was not their own doing but it is a gift of God. Their faith is a gift and this faith and now we learn that this faith is true, firm because of the person and work of Christ on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.
- **Now look at the the word "faith" in v. 5 means two things. It is like a two-edged sword in v. 5**
  - **First:** faith means the body of doctrine that we believe (the faith) and
  - **second** it also means the faith we exercise in object of our faith—Jesus Christ. These two meanings of faith cannot be separated in this verse.
- **Faith, in v 5,** is the truth and promise of God that was given in the Garden after the serpent tried to thwart and corrupt God's word. It is "the faith" that body of truth that defeats the lie of the enemy. It is "the faith" truth of the person and work of Jesus Christ that is of *good order and firm.* The point of *good order and the firmness of their faith* is that it is true because God made it true, not their ability to believe it or study it or organize it.
- **So here it is the point of application: The gospel makes our faith true, of good order and firm.** This is what Christ purchased on the cross and when He said, "*It is finished.*" He meant the power of Satan and the lie of Satan was broken (**vv. 14-15**).

If you emphasize body of doctrine at the expense of believer they you may have a dead orthodox faith. But if you emphasize strength of your faith that moves the hand of God at the expense of the body of doctrine you get the Prosperity Gospel. These are the two ditches to avoid. We must hold together good doctrine and firmness of our faith.

**But here is the rub; none of us always have strong faith.** This is why we are so dependent on grace and crying out to Jesus and reminding ourselves of His work, reminding ourselves of the gospel. A strong faith is a crying faith, confessing weakness faith, a dependent faith and a faith that realizes Christ possesses all the resources he or she needs and so we preach the strength of Christ to our hearts because the One who had infinite strength became weak that He might hold us fast.

**That is why we sing that hymn *He Will Hold Me Fast*** because our faith is not always strong and more often than not it is weak and without Christ holding us we would be hopeless. We give thanks and praise that he holds us fast.

**So when Paul says *he rejoiced to see their "good order" and the firmness of their faith in Christ*** he was not simply saying that their faith was not a mystical experience. There is always a mystery and mystical aspect to our faith in Christ but our faith has order and logical biblical doctrine that can be taught. The Bible is telling the story of God's redemption of His people and it fits together in order to point us to Jesus Christ.

**How? How did they grow in the good order and firmness of their faith in Christ? Look at Colossians 1:15-20 (read).** Remember this was an early poem that the church most likely both sang and recited in their gatherings. Why would they do that? It was to build good doctrine in their people. It was to ground them in the understanding the object of their faith—Jesus Christ. It helped them grow in the gospel and mature in Christ. Their worship gatherings were times of disciple making and spiritual formation.

**They listened to the gospels read, the Old Testament read and interpreted all of Scripture in light of Christ, they prayed the Scriptures, they sang the Scriptures and they recited them together as a church body. They taught, encouraged, rebuked and called one another to hold fast to Christ.**

- **Now let's some make application . . .**

#### Application:

- **So how do we do this today?**
  - **The same way the church has done it since the beginning.** We have the Holy Spirit, the Bible and the church. In essence we still do the same things yet in our modern age in the US we have more resources than most of the world. We have access to lots of Bible, digital resources, media and the ability to travel to churches that are not necessarily near us.
  - **Here was what happened in the early church. As the church grew and more and more people believed the gospel the false teachers crept in as well.** The tares were sown in the wheat and they sprang up together. Paul from the very beginning was dealing with false teachers and doctrine. The letters Paul wrote to churches always addressed an area of false teaching. **In the Revelation,** Jesus addressed the churches and He rebuked all but one for departure from sound doctrine.
  - So while we have a plethora of ways to access the word of God in some ways we are poorer for it. We somehow have concluded the new ways are better than the old so we have forgotten the old creeds and confessions. Now having said that . . .
  - **In the early church** in order to help people learn good doctrine and to combat false teaching, churches met in councils, carefully studied the Scriptures to address possible false teachings on the nature of God and the person and work of Jesus Christ. From these councils confessions of faith and creeds were written to help people understand correct Biblical teaching. You see the Bible is a very big book so it helps to have critical teachings of Scripture summarized for us. From these councils we get one such creed that is very helpful:
    - **The Apostle's Creed: (Trinity, Person and work of Christ, the Holy Spirit)**
      - I believe in **God, the Father almighty,**  
creator of heaven and earth.*
      - I believe in **Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,**  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
and born of the virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended to heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.  
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.*
      - I believe in the **Holy Spirit,**  
the holy catholic<sup>5</sup> church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

---

<sup>5</sup> Not the Roman Catholic Church but the church universal and for all ages.

- **Over the centuries we get wonderful confessions of faith** like the Westminster Confession, the Belgic Confession and the London Baptist Confession of 1644 and 1689.
- **Our confession of faith**, The Baptist Faith and Message 2000, finds its roots in the London Baptist Confessions.
- **Churches also developed catechisms** to teach their people and especially their children sound doctrine.
  - We read question 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism this morning as part of our remembering the gospel.
  - The Presbyterians have the Westminster Catechism and the Baptists use the Baptist catechism, which is very similar.
  - **New City Catechism . . .**
- **Here is the thing about creeds, confession and catechisms; they do not replace the importance of studying the word of God.** I grew up Southern Baptist and Baptists are notorious for being anti-creed and confessions as a reaction to the Roman Catholic faith. I always heard, “*No creed but the Bible.*” I understand that because Baptists take pride in being people of the book. I also often heard, “*The Bible is the literal, inerrant, infallible word of God.*” Yep . . . I believe that BUT I have seen many people say the same thing and then believe wrong things about the Bible. They twist the word of God like the old serpent did in the Garden.
- **So we must believe right things about the Bible.** The old orthodox teachings of the church are good for us. They have weathered the test of time because they were carefully summarized from Scripture. We must let the Bible interpret the Bible and where good, solid, historical, orthodox confessions of faith and creeds exist we should make good use of them while also remembering they do not replace the word of God nor are they inspired. They simply help us learn the word of God rightly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

#### Conclusion

- **So here is the best antidote for guarding your heart from false teaching and growing your faith—the gospel.** The gospel that saved you is the gospel that sustains you and spurs you on in spiritual maturity. We never outgrow the need to learn the depths of the gospel that is found in the whole Bible. The lie that caused Adam to sin was defeated by the Second Adam, Jesus Christ by His work on the cross.
- Notice where Paul goes in just a few sentences in **Colossians 2**. Listen to **Colossians 2:11-15 (read and explain)**
- **You see a mark of spiritual maturity or growth in spiritual maturity is to have our hearts, by faith, firm in Christ, guarded by the gospel and grounded in the gospel.**
- **Blessing:** “*Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever.*” **Amen.** Adapted from Jude 24–25.