

## Spiritual Maturity: A Heart Captivated with Christ Colossians 2:6-8

### PRAY:

- We are now coming to the heart of the letter to the Colossian church. **Verses 6-8** serve as a kind of hinge in Paul's argument in the letter. **Verses 6-7** summarize all that he had just said and **v. 8** provides the basis for his attack upon the false teachers in **vv. 16-23**.
- **Illst:** When I think of these verses that we are working through in Colossians 2, I think of the two voices that we hear in Proverbs. We hear the voices calling of Lady Wisdom and the Woman Folly. They both say very similar things but only Lady Wisdom is proclaiming truth that leads to life. These are the two voices that began to compete for our loves in the Garden of Eden when the voice of the serpent twisted the voice/word of God just enough to cause Adam and Eve to sin against their loving, wise Creator.

Since that time mankind has been trying to recover what he was created to hear—the voice of God. The only problem is that in his own ability he cannot recover it. It can only be recovered by God Himself and this is why God sent Jesus. Christ came to bring us the word of God and not just the word but Jesus is the embodiment of the word. He is Truth with a capital "T". Jesus came and paid for our sin of listening to the word of the enemy and rejecting God by dying on the cross for our sins and then defeating our enemy by rising from the dead on the third day.

Those who believe the truth of the word of God—the gospel—by turning from their sin and placing their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior are declared forgiven of their sins and righteous before God. They are redeemed and their lives are rooted in Christ. Jesus becomes their word of righteousness and wisdom on their behalf before our holy God. They receive the down payment of the Holy Spirit to fill their lives by granting them newness of life—new birth and the very presence of God living in them in order to create a hunger and desire for the wisdom of the word of God.

This sounds like it ought to end with the words "and they lived happily ever after" and that day will come but it is not this day. Our enemy still prowls around like a roaring lion seek someone to devour. The voice of the serpent, the voice of the Woman Folly is still calling and is still promising something she cannot deliver—life, freedom and the promise to be your own god or like God.

In our text today we hear Paul giving a charge to the Colossian believers to continue in Christ and a warning to not listen to the voice of the serpent proclaimed in the words of the false teachers. This is the second warning in just a few verses. The thing is there is no middle ground and it does not matter who you are. It is like the great theologian Bob Dylan wrote in his song "*Gotta Serve Somebody*."

*But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed*

*You're gonna have to serve somebody,  
It may be the devil or it may be the Lord  
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.*

**There is no middle ground.** It is either one or the other. *The question is . . . who are you going to serve? What voice will you listen to?*

- **We are still unpacking Paul's purpose in ministry that is found in Colossians 1:28,** "to present everyone mature in Christ." **Verses 6-7 give us another mark of spiritual maturity, which is: A heart that is *captivated with Christ*.** We are going to look at two evidences of a heart captivated with Christ according to vv. 6-8:

1. **Warning! Don't be Carried Off into Captivity by the Enemy (v.8)** [a heart that does not listen to the voice of the enemy]
2. **Charge! Be Captivated with Christ (vv. 6-7)** [a heart that does listen to its Savior]

#### **I. The Warning! Don't be Carried Off into Captivity by the Enemy (v. 8)**

- "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."
- **We are going to examine v. 8 first and work back to vv. 6-7.** As I said last Sunday we have an enemy and in v. 8 we see that our old enemy the devil is still at work. He is still speaking lies to God's people twisting the truth of God in order to deceive and lead astray the people of God. He is still trying to wreak havoc in the church. Paul recognizes our enemy's tactics so he gives another warning in v. 8.
- **"See to it that no one takes you captive . . ."**
  - **The point of this phrase is that the enemy is trying to enslave us to the bondage of false teaching.** There is no shortage of teachings that have as their goal to take us captive, hold us in bondage to its teachings. We might think we are unwilling accomplices but we are not. We are often held captive by teachings that sidetrack us and move us away from the person and work of Christ.

**These teachings often do not object to the gospel.** They just subtly add to the person and work of Christ. We feel like we have gained some new information and taken a step in spiritual maturity, however, ironically this false growth is not gospel growth because they move away from the gospel.

They do not talk about the biblical teaching of justification before God by faith alone and sanctification by grace through faith in person and work of Jesus. They discuss holiness or overcoming sin but not by the power of the cross of Christ. They are passionate about what they teach but they are

not passionate about the gospel. They are consumed with ethics and pragmatics instead of worship of being stunned with Christ's work on the cross.

- **Illst: *These lies of the enemy given in the form of philosophies that depend on human traditions and depend on the elementals spirits of the world are like what Homer calls, in his book the Odyssey, the intoxicating fruit of the lotus plant.***

*Here is how the story goes . . . A raging storm pushed Odysseus' ships in the land of the Lotus-eaters, where the natives give some of Odysseus's men the intoxicating fruit of the lotus. As soon as they eat this fruit, they lose all thoughts of home and long for nothing more than to stay there eating more fruit. The only way Odysseus got his men off the island was by dragging them back to the ship and locking them up.*

- **Here is the warning for us.** Even as Christians if we are not careful we are susceptible to be taken captive by the intoxicating fruit of false teaching. We should never think that we have arrived and that we do not have be concerned about being taken captive by false teaching.

Yes! We want to be maturing spiritually but we never arrive to the point where we do not have to keep watch over our doctrine. We must always keep watch on our doctrine.

Keep in mind how many older, supposedly mature pastors and seminary professors get to the end of their lives and somehow walk away from the orthodox doctrine of Christianity. If you ever say, "I will never do this" beware because you have just let the guard down that is around your heart and mind.

- *Let's look at what Paul addressed and then make application by considering some of the intoxicating false teaching we face today.*
- **"philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world"**
- **The key word in v. 8 is philosophy.** Philosophy is the love of wisdom so I do not think Paul was saying philosophy in general was bad.

Christianity is philosophical because it makes a holistic clam about the nature and reality of God, the world, human life and it sets forth a set of values to guide life. However, Christianity is based on the truth of God's word and verified by the person and work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. In other words, it is not simply philosophy—it is Truth with a capital "T".

**So I do not think that if you take a college class on philosophy you are sinning.** I think it is okay to understand what other people believe and what philosophies have influenced the world

historically so you can show them the truth of the gospel. The problem rises when you begin to believe and practice those philosophies.

- **Paul was addressing a very specific philosophy.** It was a philosophy that depended on man-made traditions and depended on the elemental spirits of the world. It was a lie and not just a lie but an empty lie made up by the enemy.
- **The *philosophy* in v. 8 was a** corrupt philosophy that began with Christianity, then added Jewish philosophy and Greek Gnosticism.

**Judaism had three main lines of philosophy:** Pharisees, Sadducees and the Essenes. It seems Paul was addressing Essenes with their ceremonialism, worship of angels and asceticism.

**It was being woven together with the Greek Gnostic mystery religion** that taught that a person must work his or her way up a long series of lesser gods, called emanations, before reaching the ultimate god.

**Finally these philosophies were being mixed with Christianity.** The whole church was in danger but especially new believers. These philosophies were intoxicating but were empty deceit.

**To make matters worse, those trying to lead the Colossian believers astray were not necessarily "bad people" morally.** As a matter of fact, they may have been morally or ethically superior to many of the Colossian Christians. They were sincere about what they believed and to top it off they were probably friends with everyone.

**However, their philosophy** was based on human tradition and dependent on the demonic spirits of the world. They were the teachings of demons.

It may have not looked demonic on the outside because they were friendly, wore nice clothes, had a sweet smile and did good works yet on the inside they were as deadly as a rattlesnake. As Jesus said of the Pharisees, they were clean on the outside but on the inside they were empty tombs filled with dead men's bones.

Finally the tactics of the false teachers were to make the Colossian believers feel small, insignificant and unspiritual. After all the Colossian believers probably felt backwards compared to every religion in their city because they were depending not on their work but the work of Another—Jesus Christ. Their standing before God was not based on their ability to become righteous but by faith alone in the righteousness of Christ.

**The teachers probably kept telling them,** *"You have got to do something. You cannot simply believe the gospel. You have to do some kind of work. You have to earn it so let us tell you what to do."*

### Application: So how to we apply this text?

- **First we recognize we have an enemy who wants to enslave us!**
  - **Remember our enemy has a goal too, Colossians 2:23 [read]**
    - **1 Peter 5:8-9**, *"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."*
    - **However our enemy is seeking to devour us but he does not always come for us with fangs and claws showing.** Most often it is in an intoxicating form or something beautiful that appeals to our senses. As it was in the Garden when Eve was tempted. **Genesis 3:6** says after Eve had listened to the serpents arguments she concluded, *"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."*
  - **The enemy proclaims freedom but in reality it is slavery.** Jesus addressed this when he confronted the error of the Pharisees. In **Matthew 11:28-30**, *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

**So we often apply this to ourselves when we are feeling worried and anxious.** We think of the troubles of life as our burdens but this is not exactly what Jesus is referring to here. That is not a bad interpretation but what Jesus is addressing is that He is the One whom they were to trust. The Pharisees arrogantly and with their desire to be super spiritual put a yoke of burdens on the people with all of the additions of their religious rules, traditions and ceremonies.

**Jesus is the exact opposite of the Pharisees.** He is gentle and humble in heart. He calls the people to faith in Him alone. He come to free us from bondage of the traditions of men.

- **Finally Gospel-distraction as deception**
  - I think one of the main tactics of our enemy is not simply the outright bondage of religion but may primarily been seen today in distraction from the gospel. This in my opinion is a huge distraction.

The deception may look and sound Christian and may even talk about Jesus but it is in reality, to borrow a term from Dr. Michael Horton, a Christ-less Christianity. Perhaps a better term is a gospel-less Christianity.
  - We must be wise when it comes to recognizing false teaching that is Christ-less or Gospel-less. It may sound super spiritual and helpful but bottom line its goal is to talk spiritual but have us obsessed with

anything but the person and work of Jesus, His cross, His gospel, and His resurrection. Here are two examples:

- **Gospel-less Spiritual Warfare** – sidetracked by trying to name demon and define their realms in order to gain power over them
- **Gospel-less Eschatology** – sidetracked by charts, dates, identifying the anti-Christ and figuring out how contemporary events fit into images in the book of Revelation.
- **Our response:**
  - We must remain centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. This is what Paul means when he says, “*according to Christ.*”
  - **Be on your guard!** How are we to be on our guard? **Verses 6-7.** This is why we are working backwards.

## II. The Charge! Be Captivated with Christ (vv. 6-7)

- **ESV:** “*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,<sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*”
- **NIV:** “*So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, **continue to live in him,**<sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*”
- **Verses 6-7** are wonderfully rich theological passage. These two verses are commands and they command something you and I cannot perform.
- **“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him”**
  - What Paul means by “**received Christ Jesus the Lord**” is not what we mean in our contemporary Evangelical culture. We use the phrase to describe someone who has become a Christian by repeating the sinner’s prayer. We will say, “The received Jesus into their heart.” This is not what this word or phrase means.

It is to “*receive*” *the tradition of* the body of teaching on the person and work of Jesus and how He came to save His people. The *tradition of Christ Jesus the Lord* is a phrase is set in opposition to, “*human tradition.*” (v. 8)

The word “*receive*” means to understand the person and work of Christ. It is more than just mental assent to facts, repeating a prayer but has actually taken hold of a person’s life in such a way that they have been transformed. It is to become obedient to the gospel because we have been born again by the Spirit of God.

- **What was that body of teaching on Jesus Christ the Lord?**
  - First Paul was referring back to everything he had said in preceding context. He was referring to the body of teaching they had been given about Jesus. Let's review:
    - **Verses 5b-12:** All they had learned from Epaphras and Paul. Paul taught Epaphras and Epaphras taught them.
    - **Verses 15-20:** Who Jesus Christ is
    - **Verse 21:** Who they were before they had been saved
    - **Verse 22:** What Christ did to save them
    - **Verse 23:** What they should do in response to being saved
  - **When he says, "so walk in him" he literally means, "remain where you are—walking in Christ."** The NIV captures the meaning well, "*continue to live in him.*" To *walk in him* was what disciples did with their teachers in that day. They lived life together. They walked together. The full body of doctrine and tradition was passed along to the next disciple and generation by *walking together*.
  - It is a charge to not quit—continue until Jesus returns. Hold fast to right doctrine and pass it along to others.
- **Application:**
  - **Verse 6 is a picture of being a disciple and making disciples.** It seems we keep running in to discipleship wherever we go in this book doesn't it?
  - **We need to be intentional about our disciple-making.** We all ought to be able to pass along our faith in Christ from one person to another and from one generation to another—they receive the body of teaching concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ.
  - It is a way of doing life together where we do what Paul, Epaphras and the Colossian church did. Paul taught it to Epaphras and he received it. He in turn passed it along to the people in Colossae where a church was born and now they must pass it along to one another and their neighbors.
- **In v. 7 we find four participles that outline Paul's argument and make his point of what it means to continue in Christ.**
  - **"rooted"**
    - **"being rooted";** Past tense, passive voice means that it was something that happened in the past but the passive voice means that the **"being rooted"** is initiated by God. They were passive in the **"being rooted"** and God was the One who acted to root them in Christ and He gave them the gift of faith in order to root them.

- **"built up in him"**
  - "built up"; Present tense, passive voice means God is the One building His people up. We are the recipients of His grace and mercy that build us up in Christ. He is the primary actor. **Philippians 1:6**, "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."
- **"established in the faith, just as you were taught"**
  - "established"; Present tense, passive voice same thing here. God has established them in the faith. What we see here is both God's part to establish us and our responsibility to teach. If God ordains the end—to be established—then He provides the means to that end—to be taught. God's role and our role are not at odds. God has ordained them both.
- **"abounding in thanksgiving"**
  - "Overflowing"; Present tense; active voice
  - **Do you know what he means by *abounding* or another way to say it is "overflowing with thankfulness"?**
    - He means that you know and understand the salvation you have been given in Christ and that you grasp that God has rooted you in Christ, is building you up in Christ and He is establishing you in the faith by His grace that you see it and are stunned!
    - The fruit of your life is to overflow with thankfulness for the gospel, the person and work of Christ.

#### Conclusion:

**The Parable of the Soils in Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23 illustrates our text very well:**

"Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. <sup>9</sup> He who has ears, let him hear." . . .

<sup>18</sup> "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:

- <sup>19</sup> When anyone **hears the message** about the kingdom and **does not understand it**, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.
- <sup>20</sup> The one who **received** the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once **receives** it with joy. <sup>21</sup> But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution

comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

- <sup>22</sup> The one who **received** the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.
- <sup>23</sup> But the one who **received** the seed that fell on good soil is **the man who hears the word and understands** it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”
- **The tactic of the enemy—to keep you from understanding the gospel.** Only one heard, understood and bore fruit is found in v. 23.
- **All the others received but never bore fruit.** One heard the teaching with his physical ears and checked it out but eventually through the difficulty of life or false teaching walked away and never yielded fruit.
- Listen to **Colossians 2:1-8** and think about *Jesus’ Parable of the Soils* . . .
- **The fruit of being rooted, built up and established in our faith in Christ is thanksgiving.** The thanksgiving is not thanksgiving for the things we have but for the fact that we have been saved by Christ. Salvation is not something to be taken for granted. Spiritual maturity results in the fruit of thanksgiving that is stunned, captivated and overflowing with gratitude that we have been saved when we know we do not deserve it.