

***Introduction...***

**In January of 1999 my whole world was new.** It was a new year and the new Spring semester had just gotten underway. I changed my major a few months before, which meant that I was in a new building with new classmates, new professors, and new subject matter. But this fresh start was about more than just the surroundings and the curriculum.

In the fall of 1998, over the Christmas break a friend shared the gospel with me and I was born again. I hadn't been to church in years and my life was filled with sin and addiction but Christ had made me new. I was still learning what it meant to repent and trust in Christ. I was just beginning to learn the Bible and the doctrines of the faith. I was young and weak but I was alive for the first time.

I walked into class that first day back and I saw an old friend I hadn't seen in years. We had grown up together, played sports together and gone to church together when we were little but hadn't seen one another for years. I sat beside him and we began to catch up and I couldn't wait to share with him that I had recently become a believer. To my surprise he shared a similar story.

For the next few weeks we spent quite a lot of time together and much of that time was spent talking about the Bible. He had a lot to share and I was eager to learn. He was convincing, he was articulate, he was polished in his thinking and looking back on it I can tell that he had been trained by the leaders of his church, but I had not.

My doctrine at the time consisted of the fact that I was a sinner and Jesus was my Savior. I didn't understand the details of how that happened and while my knowledge of the Bible was growing I was still very much a baby in the faith. I couldn't pick out truth from error and my interaction with this friend exploited this weakness in me.

He was teaching me that in order to truly be saved I needed to be baptized by the right person, in the right place and only then could I truly be sure I was a Christian. He took me to a few passages of Scripture, which all seemed to prove his point. His argument seemed plausible and in the end I believed him. I followed his line of thinking. I embraced what he was teaching me and because he had given me the key to unlock the confusion that I had on the issue...I began to share it with others.

I shared it with my friend but he didn't buy it. I shared it with my girlfriend and she too was skeptical. Then I shared it with my dad and he promptly sat me down, opened his Bible and pointed out step by step why my friend was wrong.

I didn't realize it at the time but this young man had caused me to shift from putting all of my hope in Christ to putting my hope in my own works. He had convinced me that my salvation was a Jesus + works equation and when my father pointed out my error, I was pretty devastated. My friend meant well and there is no doubt that he believed his doctrine was right, but in the end he was leading me away from Christ alone as the hope for my salvation.

***Transition...***

I hope it's not the case but I know that some of you have found yourselves in a similar situation. You know what it's like to have someone lead you to embrace false teaching. The same thing was happening to the Colossian church and that is the major reason why Paul wrote this letter. Let's look at what he says to the church...

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

***Sermon Focus...***

Here in these verse Paul gives us instruction on how we are to remain faithful to Christ when facing false teaching.

**I. Remember the Gospel (Vv. 6)**

<sup>6</sup> Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,

**Verses 6 & 7 are known as the heart of Paul's argument in this entire letter.** The church is being tempted to abandon their confidence in Christ alone and Paul is urging them to remain centered upon Jesus. He is saying, "Remember when and why you received Jesus, hold on to that and let it guide your life from this point forward."

I love the pattern we see in these verses because they help us make sure that we understand the role of faith and obedience in the Christian life. Faith comes first and our obedience is the result.

Notice what Paul says here, "As you received Christ Jesus the Lord..." In order to become a Christian and rest in the forgiveness of sins and the hope of everlasting life all that is required is for us to come to Christ by faith, to receive his precious gift. There is no work we must do in order to be saved.

"It is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, and not a result of works...**Eph 2:8-9**"

These folks became Christians when they received **Christ Jesus as Lord**. They heard about Him; who He was and what He had done. They heard about their sin and God's coming judgment. They heard about Jesus who died on the cross and then rose from the dead to save them. And these men and women believed. They put all their hope in Jesus to save them and bring them to God and Paul wants them to think back and remember when this happened.

Essentially, Paul is saying that the starting point for our Christians life and to overcoming false doctrine is the same; to remember the gospel. Remember the you are a sinner and Christ is a great savior. Remember that there is nothing that you can add to Christ's work. There is nothing that you and I can do to make up for our sin. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves except to put our hope in the One who died to do it all for us.

**Paul is saying remember this and let it be the fuel for tomorrow. Our hope for tomorrow does not shift away from the gospel to something else. There** is no hope of being saved from God's judgment outside of Christ. We didn't add anything to Christ's works on the front end, so don't allow someone to cause you to try to add anything to Christ on the back end.

Our faith begins with the gospel, it is carried along by the gospel and its future is supplied by the gospel. There is no Christianity 2.0. One biblical illustration of a church turning away and not holding onto the gospel is the church at Galatia who started out on the right foot of faith in Christ and then somewhere along the line they were taught that Christ was not enough. And Paul warned them that to deviate from a hope in Christ alone was to "fall from grace."

**Our battle against false doctrine begins by remembering the gospel and we must do this daily.** We do this by preaching the gospel to ourselves. We have to understand and remember that our relationship to God is not based on what we do it is based on what He has done. My right standing with God is the result of His grace not my works and if we can remember this we are one step closer to being equipped to battle the false teaching that would have us add our works to God's grace as the means of our salvation.

## **II. Walk in the Gospel (V. 6)**

This central confession of ***Christ Jesus as Lord*** is the foundation that helps to ward off the false teaching **and** guide our conduct in life. Obedience to Christ doesn't save us but it is a fruit that is born out of our salvation. **IOW, we don't walk in Him in order to receive Him as Lord, but because we have received Him as Lord we walk in Him.**

This term **walk** it refers to the way we live. It refers to our way of life and Paul is saying "let your conduct be fueled by and animated by Jesus and not some other religious belief or philosophy." As Christians, we are to let Christ and no other, established our values, our thinking, and our conduct.

**So let me ask you a couple of questions that I think we should ask ourselves regularly as followers of Christ:** What in your life is distinctly Christian? Is your home life distinctly Christian? Is there anything about the way you spend your time, money, etc. that uniquely shows that you love Jesus and are committed to his Word? Is your way of life, are your daily decisions being fueled by your love for Christ and His teaching or are these things being shaped by the culture and what feels good in the moment?

It's not enough for us to remember what we believed, we are also to let our faith guide our lives. It's incredibly easy for us to allow our lives and our thinking to be shaped by tradition, by the way we were raised, or by the flow of culture. But as Christians we have to fight against this impulse and let the gospel and teaching of Christ guide us.

As we preach the gospel to ourselves and let it guide our behavior the result is that we will be...

<sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Here Paul gives us four images that help to elaborate on how Jesus and His teaching are to affect our lives. The first thing he says is that we are to **rooted** in Christ. Like a tree we are to be planted in the gospel and let our roots run deep. Second, he says we are to be **built up** in him and this is a construction metaphor. Christ is the foundation and our lives are to be built upon Him and nothing else.

Third, Paul wants us to be **established** in the faith, solidly grounded, and not shifting from our faith in Jesus. And finally, he says that if we remain rooted in Christ, built up in Him and established in the faith, we will **overflow with thanksgiving**. In other words, this is not a loose connection. Paul is painting a picture of discipleship that is firmly fixed on Christ alone and producing the fruit of thanksgiving to Christ.

What we are being called to here is to let Christ and the gospel determine both our **identity** and **our conduct**.

**Let me try to illustrate what I mean by this.** How many of you had to deal with cliques when you were in school? When we were little we are all friends and we all played together but when I started junior high I found myself for the first time trying to understand which group I fit into. You had the really smart kids in school, the really athletic kids in school, the cheerleaders, the band kids and then another group of troubled kids. And each group had these unwritten rules that you had to obey if you were to be part of their group. If you identified with the group, then you were expected to act a certain way. **Your identity fueled your actions.**

Athletes dated cheerleaders and cheerleaders dated athletes. Smart kids dated band kids and vice versa. Every now and then a cheerleader would go out with one of the rebels but there was a lot of pressure for her to come to her senses. The whole system was propped up by shows like **Saved by the Bell** and movies like **Can't Buy Me Love**.

But we all got caught up in the system and we followed social expectations. Our identity within these groups determined our actions. But then as we grew up and matured a little bit we realized how silly some of this was and we began to establish our own identity based on what we believed, what we liked, what we wanted and our lives began to change, because our life was now being shaped by our new identity.

As Christians we have a new identity that is rooted in Christ and the Scriptures. And we need to grow in both. We need to grow in our trust in Jesus and our knowledge of His Word. Then as we grow we are better equipped to identify thoughts and behaviors that don't match up with the Scriptures or the gospel.

And this leads us to the third point which is...

## II. Be Captivated by Christ Alone (Vv. 8-10)

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

So how are we supposed to identify philosophies and traditions that would lead us away from Jesus? First, Paul says to examine their origin to see whether they are from Christ and the Word or if they come from human tradition. Is it from God or man?

This was a major part of Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees. They would come to Him with a question designed to trap Him but He would end up flipping it and showing them how they had actually abandoned the teaching of the Bible and put their trust in their own man made traditions. In one exchange the Pharisees ask Jesus, "Why don't your disciples follow the traditions of the Elders and wash their hands before they eat?" Jesus replied, "Why do you abandon the commandments of God in order to follow your man-made traditions?"

Another one of these exchanges took place in **Matthew 19:1-8**, where the Pharisees posed a question about whether or not it was lawful, consistent with the law of Moses, for a man to divorce his wife for any cause.

The backstory on this verse is that there *was* a provision in the law of Moses that allowed for a man to give his wife a certificate of divorce in certain cases of infidelity or idolatry. But over the years, rabbis had added their own opinion to this law. They had given husbands the ability to divorce their wives for something as trivial as failing to properly cook dinner.

And Jesus knows all of this. He knows that these men have added their own human interpretation to God's Word and have authorized the practice of things that were sinful in the eyes of God, and that these authorized practices had become normative in that day. So what does Jesus do? He goes back to the beginning and confronts them, not with the law of Moses, but with the decree of God in **Genesis 2**.

Jesus answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup> and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

So Jesus is not going to play their game nor is He going to allow them to twist God's Word. He says, "In the beginning God established and decreed that the only context for human sexuality is that which takes place between a male husband and a female wife who have been joined together in the eyes of God and having been joined together it is God's purpose that they remain that way."

**What is Jesus doing in this reply?** Well, He is confronting the Pharisees for corrupting the Word of God and promoting false teaching. He doesn't accept their teaching nor their tradition, but rather He points them back to the very beginning and to God's Word. Jesus understands that they have an opinion on this matter, but He shows them how their opinion doesn't match up with God's decree.

**So how does this happen today?** Let's stick with the issue of human sexuality and marriage. If you do a search online for "what does the Bible say about sex before marriage?" you will find articles, blog posts, videos and books that will tell you whatever you want to hear. You can find articles that support sex before marriage and articles that oppose it and depending on what you want to believe; you can adopt the view that suits you.

But the problem is that Jesus is the one who determines whether something is sinful or not. **So that blog post you read may have given you the green light on something but that guy ain't Jesus.** And when Jesus quotes **Gen 2:24** He is making it clear that nothing has changed in God's design for marriage and sexuality. If you engage in sex before marriage you are sinning against God, it doesn't matter what blog post you read. When we do this we are allowing human tradition and worldly philosophy to masquerade as *spiritual teaching* and we are being taken captive by it rather than by Christ and His Word.

**So why does this happen?** Sometimes it's a matter of confusion. Sometimes it's a matter of immaturity. Sometimes it's a matter of rebellion, but in each case we are allowing human tradition to take us captive and Paul says, "Don't allow that to happen." He even goes a little further here and says that when we do adopt human tradition and philosophy over the teaching of Christ we are begin led astray by something that is "empty and deceitful."

What this means is that this teaching doesn't add to your knowledge of God it actually takes away...it is empty. But even worse is the fact that it doesn't lead you into truth and freedom, rather it deceives you. It's a fraud and there is no value in it no matter how religious and plausible it may sound.

**What does Paul mean when he says this false teaching is according to the "elemental spirits of the world?"** Some take this to refer to the teaching as being elementary and infantile. In that case the "elemental spirits" would be referring to elemental truths and not the deep things of God. But there is another view that interprets this to refer to teaching that is promoted by spiritual forces of darkness in the heavenly realms.

This second interpretation is how the ESV translates the phrase. And this fits with the overall context of this letter. In **Col 1:16** Paul shows us that Jesus created and rules over all

things including, “thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities.” In **Col 2:15** he refers to these rulers and authorities once again. In **Col 2:18** Paul references the worship of Angels and it appears that each of these references opens the door for us to understand that one of the elements of the false teaching in Colossians had to do with focus on spiritual beings.

Whatever the precise meaning of this phrase, the point that Paul wants to make is that this teaching is “not according to Christ.” Whatever is being said is not consistent with nor is it dependent upon the teaching of Jesus. Therefore, it is not true. It might sound reasonable and it may make you feel better about your sin but it cannot save your soul.

But the Word of Christ can be trusted because...

<sup>9</sup> For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

**What does this mean? It means that it makes no sense for us to seek out the wisdom of men and human tradition when we have the eternal Son of God to lean on for understanding. It makes no sense for us to pay heed to instruction that comes from spiritual beings when God in the flesh has given us His Word once and for all.**

**Hebrews 1:1** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

In these last days God **has spoken** to us in His Son and there is no way that any created being can “add to” Christ. His Word is definitive.

### ***Conclusion...***

The point that Paul is making is that there is no way to improve upon the gospel. There is no divine mystery that needs to be revealed. Jesus Christ is God in the flesh and He has not only died for our salvation, but has also opened the door for us to enter into fellowship with Him and His father. The greatest gift that God could ever give us is Himself and that is what He has given to all those who trust in Him.

***And we have been filled in Him!*** There is nothing else that we need to save us and satisfy our souls for eternity except what we already have in Jesus.

The first steps in our battle against false teaching is to:

1. Remember the Gospel
2. Walk in the Gospel
3. Be Captivated By Christ Alone.