

Firmly Rooted

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[0 : 00] It's a joy for me to be able to be here and to bring God's word to you. What I left out of the bio is outside of being a chaplain at the Christian school and an associate! I'm also the stated clerk of Classis Wisconsin. And so behind the scenes, without you knowing, I've been sending pastors your way and processing paperwork, seeking to support you as much as I can during this time of vacancy. And so I come also very excited for Pastor Keith Bice to be coming up here.

He's become a close friend of mine. He lives like five miles from where I live. And so we're a close friend. I have a lot of respect for him. And I think he will be doing, he's a good fit for you.

So I come celebrating with you as well. And now I have to tease him. He's giving me more work because now I have to walk with another church through a vacancy. But as I've been told, I also transitioned out. So I gave myself a lot of work in this. If you have your Bibles with you, you can open them to Colossians 2. And we're looking at verses 6 through 5.

I'm going to move this off to the side. 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.

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. In him also you were circumcised with the 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 also were 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.

[2 : 41] He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him. The reading of the word of the Lord. Let's come to him in prayer before we dive in.

Heavenly Father, we come to you this morning so thankful. Thankful that you're our God. Thankful that you've called us to be your people.

Thankful for the way in which you care for us and provide for us. And in particular now, Father, we're thankful for the way that you care for us and provide for us through your word.

And we pray that in this time, as we dive into your word, that you would speak to us clearly and powerfully. We recognize that we all come here with many different things on our hearts and minds. Some come with anxieties. Some come with fears. Some come with just busyness and all of the to-do lists that need to get done. And Father, we just pray that you would calm and quiet our hearts and minds this morning.

[3 : 51] Push anything that could distract us from hearing you speak. Just push that off to the side. And speak clearly and powerfully to each one of us this morning.

So that when we walk away, we know that we've heard you speak. And we've been changed as a result of hearing your word. We pray all this in the name of our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen. A while back, I came across a really great quote from a Puritan named Thomas Watson.

He said this, When the devil cannot destroy the church by violence, he endeavors to poison it.

When the devil cannot destroy the church by violence, he endeavors to poison it.

And I think it's such a powerful insight because I think many of us are kind of ready for maybe the frontal attack that would come to us, right?

[4 : 53] I think many of us, if someone came up to us and said, Deny Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. We kind of would catch it. We'd recognize it and be like, No, I'm not going to do that.

Right? And I think many of us, to some degree anyways, are ready. We're prepared to suffer for the sake of the gospel. Suffer for the name of Jesus Christ.

And so what Thomas Watson was saying is, Satan knows that. He's not foolish in that. And so he doesn't come and take a frontal assault. He kind of sneaks around and seeks to poison the church. And one of the ways he poisons it, he sends false teachers into the church. And they don't outright lie and teach false doctrine. We catch that really easily. We catch that quickly.

And so what they do is they take the truth and just twist it and taint it just a little bit. Just enough to poison it. And then that poison begins to spread through the church.

[5 : 53] It's one of the themes in the book of Colossians, actually. It's one of the themes that Paul's been getting at throughout the book leading up to this passage we're looking at.

He talks a lot about plausible arguments and being careful about these plausible arguments. But in this morning's passage, he kind of ramps things up quite a bit and uses really strong language.

In verse 8, he says, See to it that no one takes you captive. And we recognize some level of how strong the language is.

But one of the commentators said it probably could have been translated, Don't let anyone kidnap you. And even stronger language than that, he says, Don't let anyone carry you off as plunder.

And it's this image from back in the early first century and before of an army coming in, conquering a village, taking people captive and hauling them off into a foreign land.

[7 : 00] And he said that's what Paul's warning us about. That there are people actively coming, seeking to take you captive and haul you away from Christ.

And he says, take specific action to make sure that doesn't happen. And he gives us some examples of different ways in which people will try to haul us off and take us captive.

In verse 8, he says, See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit. It's not two different things that he's talking about.

Empty deceit is kind of clarifying the word philosophy. He's not saying we shouldn't study or read philosophy. So if you're a philosopher, don't worry. He's not saying, like, I know many good, solid pastors who've studied philosophy.

So that's not his point. What he's saying is that there are these philosophies out there that are just full of emptiness. They're just kind of full of fluff and full of deceit. And he said they're leading you astray.

[8 : 02] And the reality is I don't think many of us, I think we're aware of that. All you have to do is pull open social media and scroll a little bit. And you're going to be like, there's a lot of empty deceit here.

A lot of empty philosophy seeking to lead me astray. And they're not neutral. It's not just a bunch of ideas that are just kind of floating around out in the world.

Paul says these philosophies are actively seeking to lead you away from Christ. And so he says be aware of that. Don't let it happen.

The second way that we're taken captive and led away from Christ is in verse 8. He says don't see two of them. No one takes you captive. And then he says according to human tradition.

That's one of the ways that we can be easily taken captive and led astray. And there's kind of two sides to this. One side is one of Jesus' kind of primary battles that he had with the Pharisees.

[9 : 05] And in Mark chapter 7 verse 9, Jesus looks at the Pharisees and says, you have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition.

And Paul says that's one of the ways that we can be taken captive and led away from Christ. These traditions that kind of get embedded and then end up morphing into something that actually leads us away from Christ rather than leading us to Christ.

And he says be careful about that. Be wary of that because that can happen. Kind of the more subtle version. You know, I've been a pastor in a church for almost 20 years now.

The more subtle version of human tradition is the common phrase is this is the way we've always done it. Maybe it's not a Pharisaical tradition, but it's just this. Well, this is how we do things here.

I don't. There's no other way. And Paul says that too. It may seem innocent. It may seem minor. But some of those, this is how we've always done it, can be things that take us captive and lead us away from Christ.

[10 : 07] He says be careful about that. Be on the watch for that. He gives a third one, one that we don't talk about often and one that may be a little confusing. He says see to it that no one takes you

captive according to the elemental spirits of the world.

And the question is, what in the world does that mean? What are the elemental spirits of the world? Take some level of comfort that even, of course, the commentators, they don't agree on this. They're not quite sure what he means. But they've come up with two different opinions. One, many of the commentators say that the elementary spirits of the world are more, he's speaking more about elementary principles of the world.

Kind of like what we would say that the elementary basics, the ABCs. And he said don't be taken captive by that. And what they're saying is, if that's what Paul's saying, he's saying make sure that you're not held captive in your immaturity.

That you don't grow up into Christ. If you stay constantly immature, you end up being gullible and easily led astray. The other option is that the elementary spirits of the world are hostile spiritual forces.

[11 : 23] They're actively coming to take you captive and to lead you away from Christ. The word that's used can actually mean either one of those things. In my opinion, I have a tendency to do this.

My seminary professors told me not to, but that's okay. I think it's both. I think it is hostile spiritual forces. Paul's been talking about it over and over again.

He's going to talk about it again at the end of our passage. And I think one of the ways that hostile spiritual forces lead us astray is by keeping us constantly immature.

Keeping us distracted. And the more immature we are, the easier it is to kind of lead us astray and pull us off in a direction. Last summer, I kind of got on this random kick where I was reading all these Pew research polls and stuff.

Just trying to get an idea of all the polling that they did of Christianity in the United States. And a couple of the statistics kind of jumped out at me. One of the polls said that 50 to 66%, so a half to two-thirds of self-professing Christians have rejected the idea of absolute truth.

[12 : 40] So 50% to two-thirds have rejected that. And another one that kind of came out right after that was that 27% of self-professing Christians are regularly going to astrology and horoscopes and trying to read the planets and the stars in order to figure out their future.

And I kind of point those things out because I think that's what Paul's talking about a little bit. That there's people who are Christians and they maybe even want to dive in deep into some spiritual things.

They want to figure it out. And yet those spiritual things are not leading us closer to Christ. What they're doing is they're leading us away from Christ. They're actually keeping us immature and making it easier to be led astray.

So Paul says, be warned about that. He says, really, the only thing that we should be taken captive by is Jesus Christ himself. That's what he says in chapter 2, verse 8.

See to it that no one takes you captive and not according to Christ. So don't be taken captive by these philosophies and empty deceit, but be taken captive according to Christ.

[13 : 58] Don't be taken captive by human tradition or that's the way we've always done it, but be taken captive according to Christ. Don't be taken captive by spiritual forces.

Be taken captive by Christ. And anything else that's not centered in him or rooted in him is actually a threat to your spiritual security.

And can cause you to be taken captive and led astray. And here's why that's the case. If you look at verses 9 through 10, it says, For in Christ the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you've been filled in him who's the head of all rule and authority.

We're to look to Christ. We're to be taken captive by Christ because he's fully God. He has all power, all authority over all of creation. And Paul says, and he's in you.

When was the last time you thought about that? The God who spoke the universe into creation is in you. And Paul says, so why are you looking somewhere else for wisdom, satisfaction, peace, purpose?

[15 : 17] You have the God of the universe in you to give you what you need when you need it. Why look anywhere else? And Paul goes on.

He reminds us, not only is the God of the universe in you, but he's done some things for you. In verse 13, it says, You who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh.

Remember who you were before Christ saved you. You were dead. Not sick like me. You were dead. And on top of that, verse 14, he says, There's this record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

And so not only is Paul reminding you before you were in Christ, you were dead, but you had this weight of debt kind of bearing down on you. You were born into that debt.

And then every single sin of your life since then was like swiping a credit card over and over and over, piling up debt upon debt upon debt upon debt upon debt until it was completely unpayable.

[16:27] And the picture that Paul gives is this is hopeless because you're dead. You can't pay it off. And yet, Christ comes in and in verse 13 it says, You were dead in your trespasses.

Now God made you alive together with him. You didn't bring yourself back to life. God stepped in and said, Wake up. I'm here for you.

He calls you to himself. And then he makes you alive together with him. And then he forgives all our trespasses, canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. And I think sometimes we live as if God came in and he made us alive and then said, All right, now your job is to work off the debt.

The rest of your life you're going to be like my indentured servant. You're just going to keep working and working, trying to pay off the debt. And Paul says, No, when he raised you back to life and then he took the balance sheet, he wrote, paid in full on it, and then he ripped it up, nailed it to the cross, said, You don't have to worry about that anymore.

[17:39] I've taken care of it. And then he does even more than that. And it's one of the big themes of Colossians. I don't want to downplay him forgiving our sins and canceling the record of debt.

But beyond that, he begins to work in you to transform you and to shape you into his image. He talks about that in this passage in a unique way, one that gets kind of confusing.

But I want to take a moment to explain it. So look at verses 11 through 12, because that's where he's getting at. It says, There's a lot there.

I'm just going to kind of hit the highlights. But I want to make sure you catch some of the themes in there. And then I want to tie those themes together. He talks about circumcision. He talks about spiritual circumcision.

And he talks about baptism. He's talking about the dying away of the old self and the rising to life of the new. And he talks about faith, which is kind of at the center of it all, tying it all together.

[18:59] And when you think about circumcision, there's something that I think got missed in the Old Testament, or we've missed it. The physical act of circumcision was never the end goal.

Deuteronomy 30, verse 6. Here's what we read. The Lord God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and that you may live.

And so we even see in that passage, and there's a lot I could cover there, but that the physical act of circumcision was actually a sign and a seal of the spiritual reality of a heart that was circumcised. And you could say that the physical act of circumcision was a sign of the cutting away of the old life, or the dying away of the old life, and the rising to life of the new.

That's what Paul's saying in this passage. And what Paul's saying is that when you believed in Christ, when you put your faith and trust in Christ, that happened to you.

[20:03] You were circumcised in that way. Your old self was cut away. And your new life was implanted in you. And you're now being raised to new life so you can serve Christ and follow him all the rest of your days.

So you're not just forgiven. Thank God. You're transformed. I've said this so many times, but how disappointing would it be to come to Christ and say, I'm such a sinner.

I need your forgiveness. And he's like, all right, I'm going to forgive you, but you're going to continue living the rest of your life in sin. And making the same struggles over and over and over again.

I mean, we do in some ways. But there's this hope where he says, I'm going to transform you. And tomorrow you're not going to be who you were today. And in five, ten years, I'm going to draw you closer to me.

I'm going to transform you. And I'm going to shape you into who I want you to be. There's one more thing that Christ has done for us.

[21:11] If you look at verse 15, it says this, He disarmed the rulers and the authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them.

These rulers and authorities, these are these spiritual powers that we talked about earlier and that he's been talking about through the book of Colossians and these spiritual forces.

Just to make sure we're clear, this is Satan and his demons. And it says Christ not only has defeated them, I think we know that he's defeated them on the cross, but what this passage says, he didn't just defeat them, he humiliated them.

He took all their weapons, paraded them through the streets as defeated enemies. And it's this reminder for Christians that we don't need to be in fear of Satan and his demons.

Christ has defeated them, stripped all of their weapons from them. And I want to point out, when he disarmed them, what are the weapons that they use against us in this battle?

[22 : 18] Like I say, some of the primary weapons are accusation, guilt, shame. Right? So you mess up, Satan comes, maybe his whole army comes and say, look at you, you call yourself a Christian.

Christians don't do that. And you sit and you just kind of like beat yourself up, right? Over and over and over again. I remember one of the stories I often tell, I have four daughters, you've heard that, they all drive cars.

I have to fix them all. Which is always a process of sanctification. Last week, I probably spent 40 hours working on one of the cars. And at some point, something breaks, as does happen.

And even as a pastor, words start coming out of your mouth that shouldn't come out of your mouth, right? And, you know, I used to, like, sit in a, I remember, like, having moments where I had to sit in my chair and I would just sit and just beat myself up, like, who are you?

Why would you do that? I can't believe, you've been a Christian for, you just sit and just kind of wallow in self-pity. And I remember having this moment where I'm like, what am I doing? What am I accomplishing with this?

[23 : 37] Christ has forgiven me. The response of a Christian isn't to sit and try to, like, atone for our sin by beating ourselves up, by letting the enemy come in and attack us. The response of a Christian is, repent.

It's like, sorry. I did it again. I'm so sorry. I know, like, I'm thankful for your mercy. Forgive me. Cleanse me. And when you do that, you're free.

It's gone. It doesn't sit and hang over you. You're free. That's how those weapons of the enemy have been disarmed and removed. You don't have to sit and dwell on these things.

You just confess it. You repent it. Christ frees you. And you say, please help me so I don't do it again. And he says, I'm going to keep walking with you so that you don't do it again, little by little.

That's why Paul says in verse 6, he says, as you've received Christ, walk in him. And what he's saying is, it's actually not just walk in him. It's not like a one-time thing, but just keep on walking in him.

[24 : 40] Keep your eyes on him and follow him. And the goal of what he's saying is, like, you can do that. Like, the reason you can keep on following Christ is because of all of the things that we've talked about.

You can keep on walking in Christ because he's cleansed you. He's forgiven you. He's freed you. He's disarmed the enemies who are coming after you.

He's done all of these things. And one of the ways he says that we can keep on walking in him, he talks about in verse 7. He says, you need to make sure you're rooted and built up in him and established in the faith as you were taught.

Right? If immaturity is one of those things that causes us to be easily led astray, one of the ways to fight against that is to grow up in maturity, to be rooted and established in our faith.

It gives us wisdom to continue to keep moving forward, keep our eyes on Christ. It protects us from being led astray. And then just one final point that I think is important.

[25 : 47] It gets skipped over often when I hear this verse preached. If you look at the end of verse 7, it says, Therefore, as you receive Christ the Lord, so walk in him. And then at the end of verse 7, it says, Abounding in thanksgiving.

And I think often that gets kind of this throwaway phrase, like, oh yeah, we're supposed to be thankful. Christ has done a lot for us. But in this passage, he's actually saying, this is a tool.

This is something that prevents you from being led astray. This is something that gives you the strength to keep on following him even when things are hard.

That being thankful actually helps you to be rooted and established. And if I say it the opposite way, I think it helps us maybe make sense of what he's saying.

So here's the opposite. Someone who lives their life ungrateful and unthankful will be much more easily manipulated and taken captive and led astray by philosophies, traditions, and hostile spirits.

[26 : 55] And the reason I say that, and I want to make sure I bring that up, is I won't... I was a car salesman for a while. Don't ask.

It was a terrible two months of my life. But one of the things that they teach you is, like, if you want to be a kind of... I hope there's no car salesman in here. You can be a good one. But I was taught poorly, and they're like, you want to pick at this thing and make them ungrateful for the vehicle they have.

And then you bring them this beautiful vehicle. I buy it, right? You point at their ungratefulness. You start... Go home, I don't know, scroll through Instagram, TikTok, the first words out of people's mouth will be like, you feeling fat and overweight and tired today?

Yeah, I am. Well, let me... What are they trying to do? They're trying to make you ungrateful so they can give you this empty philosophy and deceit.

Right? And so one of the tools to not be taken captive by these things is to be abounding in thanksgiving. And how can we not be abounding in thanksgiving? We have a God who brought us back from the dead, canceled the record of debt against us, and said, I'm going to live in you, give you what you need every moment of every day.

[28 : 13] Just keep your eyes on me and trust me, and I'll bring you through. Let's come to him in prayer. Heavenly Father, we are so thankful for the way in which you care for us and provide for us.

And we come to you, we confess that we are often ungrateful, we're often easily led astray, we don't seek to grow up and mature in the faith, we don't rest in your forgiveness and often try to beat ourselves up and atone for our own sins.

Father, we just confess all these things to you. We're so thankful we can do that freely, knowing that your grace and mercy, you'll forgive us, you'll cleanse us from our sin.

And not only that, Father, we pray that your spirit would be at work in each one of us, strengthening us to see you more fully, strengthening us to mature and to grow up in the faith, strengthening us to abound in thanksgiving for who you are and what you've done.

Father, do that work in us because we want to keep walking in you, we want to keep following you. We want to bring glory and honor to you in everything we say and do in our lives.

[29 : 50] We pray all this in the name of our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. As I was preparing this sermon and thinking about communion, I had another quote running through my mind.

I'm not going to read it because it was written 500 years ago. The language is a little weird. But it was written by a guy named Martin Buser. He was a pastor during the Reformation.

And he wrote that one of the best ways for Christians to prevent spiritual weakness in our lives. If you just stop there, this is everything that Paul's been talking about. One of the best ways to prevent you from being led astray.

The best way to do that is to joyfully and passionately engage in the life of the church and its practices. The more disconnected you get from the church and the practices, the more easily it is to be led astray.

And with that in mind, I want to just remind us of what we're doing when we participate in this meal. That not only is this meal this powerful reminder to us that Christ is enough, that he has done everything needed for your salvation, everything needed to bring you through this life so you can finish the race with him, reminded of his broken body, reminded of his poured out blood.

[31 : 18] But we also believe that what we're doing here, this isn't just a reminder, but as we eat this meal, as we eat the bread and as we drink the cup, he's nourishing and strengthening our souls.

He's building you up, giving you strength for the journey, giving you strength to continue to do what he's called you to do. So this is one of these meals that reminds us Christ is enough.

And so take a moment as we participate in this to just rest in him, trust in him. And one of the reasons why the Catholic Church calls this the Eucharist, abound in thanksgiving for what he's done for us.

Hear the institution of the Lord's Supper from 1 Corinthians. For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you. The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread.

And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

[32 : 31] Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Let's come to him in prayer. Heavenly Father, we come to you this morning recognizing that it is good and right for us to give you thanks and to abound in thanksgiving because you are the one true God.

You created all of this with a breath. You are the source of life, the source of goodness, and you fill your creation with your blessing.

In particular, now, Father, we come, we give you thanks for Jesus Christ. We're thankful for his life, for his death, for his resurrection. We're thankful for the eternal life that he's given us.

And we thank you for this meal that you've given us. That we can continue to participate in this meal until Jesus Christ comes again. And so we pray that your spirit would now bless this meal, that this would nourish us and strengthen us to do the work that you've called us to do in the world.

[33 : 58] We pray that we would leave from here strengthened to live a life that brings glory and honor to you. We pray all this in the name of our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen. Congregation of Jesus Christ, the Lord has prepared his table for all who love him and for all who trust in him alone for their salvation.

Anyone here who's truly sorry for their sins, who believes in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and who desires to live in obedience to him as Lord is now invited to come with gladness to the table of the Lord.

These are the gifts of God for the people of God. And as I understand the distribution, you'll come to the middle and come up and take a piece of bread and take a cup and then find your seat and hold on to them because we'll eat and drink of them together as a body.

Amen. Amen. Amen.