

Continue in Christ - don't be deceived

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[0 : 00] Father God, thank you for Jesus. Thank you that he speaks to us by his spirit and through his word. And please, would you help us this evening? Help us to see what it is you want us to see.

Help us to understand what you want to say, that we would grow in Christ all the more. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Just to start, I wanted to ask you a question.

And you're going to do a lot of this work as well. So here's a question for you. Is Christianity a religion where you want to move forward or stay where you are? Is Christianity a religion where you want to keep moving or stay where you are?

Over to you. Do chat to the people next to you. Let me just break into your conversations there.

I wonder what you said. Quite a tricky question, actually. And I think it can be interpreted in both ways. That's what we're thinking about here. That's the nub of Paul's argument in this section of Colossians.

[1 : 09] And just a little bit of background again, if you've not been here since we started this series. In Colossians, it was a church in the ancient world. It was surrounded by many terrific things in a multicultural society.

And the temptation for these Christians that was coming to them from false teachers was this. Hey, if you really want more Christianity, if you want more spirituality, if you want more of Jesus, if you really want to grow, then what you need to do is these things here.

You've got Jesus. Great. You know the Christmas story. You know the Easter story. Fantastic. But if you really want more, you need to do these things here. And so the Christians in Colossians or in Colossae, they were tempted to leave Jesus behind as if Jesus was the training wheels.

Christianity explored, perhaps. And the really good stuff, the really maturing stuff was found from these false prophets, these false teachers. To put it another way, I wonder, does everyone know what Spotify is?

Of course, look how young you are. Of course you do. So there's a thing. I think there's still a thing in Spotify called Spotify Premium. If you don't know what Spotify is, it's a music streaming service where you pay some money to the internet.

[2 : 33] That sounds weird, doesn't it? But Spotify has every song ever written, basically. And if you want to listen to every song, you get this premium package.

And they give you every song that's ever been written. Now, imagine you're a Christian. Being a Christian, being in Christ is like having Spotify Premium. You've got every song ever written.

In Jesus, you've got everything. You've got the more already. And someone knocks at your door and says, hey, listen, would you like to buy the latest Justin Bieber album? And you think, oh, I really would.

I really love the Biebs. I really love him. Not I, but someone else. And Paul says, no, no, you've already got Spotify Premium.

You've already got Jesus. Nothing they are offering you can be different or more than you already have. Does anyone remember Encyclopedia Britannica?

[3 : 35] A lot of blank faces. There you go. See, before the internet, all of the knowledge in the world was held in these 24 volumes of Encyclopedia Britannica. And they used to have these people come around to your house and knock on the door and try to sell you a volume or the whole set.

It costs thousands, I think. And it used to take pride of place in someone's house. Oh, look at my encyclopedias. Look how heavy they are. Look how smart I am. Well, it's like someone knocks on your door and says, hey, listen, do you want a book about birds?

And you say, oh, yeah, I'd love to know more about birds because they flap around and things like that. And then Paul says, no, you've already got Jesus. You've got Encyclopedia Britannica. You've got the full set. You've got all the knowledge about birds already. In Jesus, you already have more. That's what's going on in this letter. There's a spiritual sickness in this church.

And these false teachers have come in and sort of played on that sickness. Hey, do you really want more spirituality? You need to do these things. And that's where you get to verse 6.

[4 : 42] Please look at verse 6. This is the middle of the letter. But in many ways, it's the center of the letter. This is the key verse. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness.

He says, continue to live your lives in him. What Paul wants for them more than anything is to stay with Jesus. Continue, he says. And do you notice the illustration in verse 7?

Rooted and built up. Do you notice what that illustration is? It's of a tree and of a building. And so, over to you for a few seconds. What do a tree and a building have in common?

Over to you. Please talk to the person next to you. All right. I'm going to interrupt. That wasn't long. Sorry to be a fascist about time.

Okay. Can we pretend that we're not grown-ups? And just call out answers to me. So, what do a tree and a building have in common? Anyone? Tall. What did you say?

[5 : 53] Tall. Yep. Tall. Yep. What else? They need to build a foundation below before they can grow up. All right. That's basically the answer. Gold. I thought you were going to give me more time.

Gold star. Josh Caruana. In order for it. Is that what other people had? Foundations. Yeah. In order for a tree and a building to grow outwards, to have more, it's got to grow downwards.

Stronger foundations. Stronger roots. Same thing here. Continue to live your lives in Jesus, rooted and built up in him.

Strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness. And now look at verse 8. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world, rather than on Christ. You see, Paul labors the goodness of God in Christ so that the Colossians will not be captivated by new teaching. Again, do you see the illustration in there?

[6 : 56] Taken captive by hollow and deceptive philosophies. Paul is saying, be so sure of who Jesus is, that he is everything, that no one can knock on your door and say, hey, do you really want more Jesus?

Paul says to do that would be to be taken captive, to be taken hostage by hollow and deceptive philosophy. Nothing they can sell you can be more than what you already have in the gospel.

Chapter 1, Jesus is everything. Chapter 2, don't leave him. That's the whole book of Colossians, essentially. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy.

And it might be easy to think, wow, these are wise words for the baby Christians. But for a church like this, especially a mature church like this, we don't really need these warnings.

But they are sort of famous last words, aren't they? Look again at the language Paul uses, captive, hollow, deceptive philosophy. Philosophy can mean a way of thinking about or understanding life in the world, a bit like a worldview.

[8 : 11] So the Christian worldview is basically chapter 1, verse 15 to 23, which was a couple of weeks ago. Paul reminds them of what they have and who they are. And he warns them, don't be deceived.

Don't be taken captive by something else. It will only be hollow and it will only be lies, deceptive. And so what I want to do is present three sorts of things that we can be taken captive by.

The first one, I think it's fairly obvious, but the next two are much more subtle. So the first one, you might have heard of the naturalistic worldview. It sort of says that what we can observe in the natural world is really all that exists.

That's materialism, humanism, those sorts of things. I think it's pretty hard for a church like this to be taken captive by that. But anyway, that's still out there. Perhaps an Islamic worldview.

They have a different view of who Jesus is. They still hold to the God of Abraham, but when it comes to Jesus, they depart. And again, I don't think many people in this church will be taken captive by naturalism or Islam.

[9 : 18] But what I want to do is talk about a couple more deceptive ones. So what about these for our culture? So the movement of climate change, the movement towards well-being and health, and where food practices become a sort of semi-religious commitment.

What about speakers such as Jordan Peterson? These sorts of things. None of these things claim to be religious, but the way they take us captive, the way they replace Jesus, the way they move us on from him to something more, I think they could easily be classed as hollow and deceptive philosophies.

It's not that all of the things of climate change or health and well-being or even Jordan Peterson are bad, but when they take the place of Christ in our lives, when they become a semi-religious commitment, then we have moved on from the gospel of Jesus.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy. So that's those sorts of things. But I want to talk about the last one, and that is a Christian social justice worldview. For example, caring for the needy. It's easy to be captivated because it sounds so good. Loads of people will be with you. It seems quite biblical.

[10 : 43] It seems absolutely loving to care for those less fortunate. And that is actually true. So we read about love and care, fair treatment for the poor.

We read about them in the Bible. You can justify them from a Christian worldview. All Christians should probably be involved in ministries like this. Paul writes about the Lord Jesus, who was rich yet became poor.

So through his poverty, we might become rich. James writes about true religion as taking care of orphans and the widows. It's right for Christians to follow in the steps of Christ and care for the poor, to have a Christian social justice worldview.

And even for us in our church, it's possible for our tradition that care for the poor can be sort of diminished by knowing your Bibles better. But the danger of this worldview is that a care for the poor, again, can take us captive and move us on from following and growing in Christ.

So the real mission could be to look after people who are impacted and help them better only for this life. And I think it's deceptive because it's widely accepted.

[11 : 59] You'll always be popular if you want to care for the poor. It's captivating because the way that the change occurs is very tangible.

You can see someone go from a poverty to looking after themselves. It gives us a great feeling to set people up and help them to look after them. And it's a good thing.

It's great to let the love of Christ motivate us to care for them. But here's the thing. If that is all it is, if all it is is caring for them in this life, and that moves us on from Christ and becomes our everything or our mission as a church, then I wonder if that can border on being a hollow and deceptive philosophy.

See, you don't need Jesus' death and resurrection to look after the poor. Plenty of atheists look after the poor. It doesn't depend on Christ, but just sort of a felt human need.

And Paul again reminds the Colossians, keep moving on through the verses. So verse 9, And basically that's chapter 1 all over again.

[13 : 17] Jesus is everything. Don't leave him for another philosophy. Don't leave Jesus for Jordan Peterson. Don't leave Jesus for climate change action.

Don't leave Jesus for health and well-being and these sorts of things. In Christ you have everything. Paul says, Have nothing to do with those other teachings.

Don't be taken captive by them. Because in Christ, the fullness of God. And in Christ you have his fullness. It's a bit tricky to consider the fullness of God. But just think about what you know about God.

He's the creator of all things. He's the sustainer of life. He's the head of every authority. Jeff told me that in your recent series in Exodus, You saw God's power and plan as he rescued the Israelites.

Through Egypt, through the plagues and the Red Sea. He's a mighty, loving and gracious God. Here Paul teaches the Colossians that The fullness of this powerful and active God dwells in Christ.

[14 : 17] Everything in God seen in a person. If we had a time machine, If you managed to buy a DeLorean 2,000 years ago, You could go back and see God walking around the ancient world.

All of God walking in a person. And not only this, But God is the one who's brought them to believe in Jesus.

To fullness. Meaning Christ has filled them with his fullness. Which means he's filled them with God. What does that mean for them? What does that mean for us? It means we've been raised with Christ.

Completely put off. What is earthly. You know like a shower washes away the dirt that clings to your body afterwards. In the same way, we've put off earthly things.

Your earthly nature is washed away down the drain. Verse 11 and 12. In him you are also circumcised. With a circumcision not performed by human hands.

[15:13] Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off. When you are circumcised by Christ. Having been buried with him in baptism. In which you were also raised. With him through your faith in the working of God.

Who raised him from the dead. In these verses, Paul mentions three things that only God can do for us. They are circumcision. Being buried. And being raised.

Now the first two. You might think you can do. But have a look again. Verse 11. In him you were also circumcised. With a circumcision not performed by human hands.

So it's possible to perform a human circumcision on yourself. Though I'm not sure why you'd want to do that. But this one is one not performed by human hands. Circumcision is a cutting off.

It cuts off your earthly nature. That's what the flesh is. See we can get circumcised. The Israelites did it as a religious practice.

[16:10] But only God can sort of snip away our sinful nature. Secondly is buried. He says we've been buried with Christ in baptism. Sounds like we can do those things too.

My son buries things around the garden. He looks pretty good at doing that. But just like circumcision is a spiritual form. So here buried is a spiritual thing.

It's a spiritual burial. And he says a spiritual baptism as well. If you think back to the ministry of John the Baptist. He promised that Christ would come and baptise with the Holy Spirit.

See John baptised with water. Christ would come to baptise with the Holy Spirit. It was a sort of a washing away of your insides. No amount of water you drink could clean your heart.

Only sort of taking in the Holy Spirit. A baptism of the Spirit can wash your heart. Verse 12 says, Having been buried with him in baptism. In which you were also raised with him.

[17:11] Through your faith in the working of God. Who raised him from the dead. It says, We are raised with him through faith in the working of God. In Christ, we who believe, that is Christians.

We're brought to fullness. Our sinful nature is circumcised away from us. We're raised a new creation. Not done by human hands. Not living an earthly sinful life.

But raised by the working of God. It says that, When you were dead in your sins. In the uncircumcision of your flesh. Verse 13. God made you alive in Christ.

He forgave us all our sins. Having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness. Which stood against us. And condemned us. He's taken it away by nailing it to the cross. When Jesus died on the cross.

Do you know what was written above his head? It was the charge for which he died. It said, King of the Jews. What Paul is saying here is, When Jesus died, it's like he took all of my sins.

[18:11] All of them. And he put them on a placard. And he nailed them above Jesus' head as well. Jesus dies not just for being king of the Jews. But also for everything I have done.

And everything you have done. See, that is the greatest weapon. That the enemy has against us. Call yourself a Christian. But if they only knew what you did then.

If they only knew what you're thinking. How can you sit here today? That's the greatest weapon the powers and dominions of darkness have. Well, this verse says, He forgave us all our sins.

Having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness. Which stood against us. Rightly that is. And condemned us. Rightly. It says, He has taken it away. Nailing it to the cross.

And that means the earthly, the powers and authorities in verse 15 are disarmed. He made a public spectacle of them. Their best weapon was to charge us legally with these crimes.

[19:13] But if Jesus forgave us those things. If they were nailed to the cross when Jesus died. What weapon, what ammo does Satan have against us?

Nothing. And that's why Jesus points and laughs at him. He has the victory. He triumphs. He made a public spectacle of them. He points and goes, Ha ha ha! Like this to the devil.

And therefore, Verse 16, Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink. Or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or Sabbath day.

These are a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ. And again, let me read verse 18. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you.

Such a person also goes into great detail over what they've seen. They're puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. They've lost connection with the head from whom the whole body supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews grows as God causes it to grow.

[20 : 17] You see, Jesus is everything. Faith in him means you also have everything. If you stay rooted and built up in him, it's all yours.

And you might imagine some people say, well, yes, that's what you have. It's good that you are in Christ. But it's important to do these things too. Or they might say, yeah, but if you're not involved in this, then are you really a Christian?

How mature can you be? We all do this. Do you do this? All you do is believe in Jesus. But we are doing all these things. See, if you aren't involved in a worship or a religious festival or a style of worship or this Christian religious practice, what does that say about your relationship with God? You really need more. And so they judge. That's the language in verse 16. They judge you. Or verse 17.

Sorry, verse 18. They disqualify you. And I don't think that Paul is saying that religious festivals are bad inherently because they help us to remember about Jesus so they can be good.

[21 : 29] But I think the essence of the warning comes here. It's when the humanness of the practice, a humanness of the religious activity, takes over. So if someone says, well, you didn't really do that right.

You didn't really read the Bible correctly. You aren't really reaching my standard of the Lord's Supper. Oh, this is the way we've always done music. If you don't do it this way, what does it say about you?

These are quite real dangers, aren't they? We can be guilted into the so-called righteousness of these influences. We can be fooled into thinking you need to maintain some acceptable level to have more.

But when the necessity of those practices sort of trump the underlying root of them, when they produce guilt for those who aren't up to scratch or arrogance in those who are doing them right, that's the problem.

Paul warns, verse 22, of rules based on human commands and teachings that are destined to perish. So what I want to do is just take a few moments to think about what kinds of human traditions and practices we do that could produce guilt or perhaps arrogance if we don't do them via a certain human standard.

[22 : 49] So what I'm going to do is, I've spoken enough, I'm going to hand it over to you just in pairs or threes, whatever. What sorts of Christian practices can produce guilt or arrogance if not done to a sort of human standard?

Over to you. Okay, let me interrupt your conversation now. I've got quite a few examples. I wonder what you said. There's many practices, many sort of religious activities attached to Christianity which can become a sort of human tradition in that they're good things but we can put guilt, we can put arrogance into them and sort of humanness into them and take away the goodness from them. So I wonder what some of the things you said were. Probably don't shout them out at me because maybe discuss it over chicken and chips but I'm going to talk about a few now and we'll see if these ring true with you.

So a couple of obvious ones. So Sabbathing, do you know what that is? Sabbathing? People who are adamant about the Sabbath. Sabbath is a law keeping to set aside, well I suppose it's traditionally Saturday but it's now Sunday in our world.

So a whole day of the week dedicated to serving God. Sounds like a good idea, doesn't it? Seems biblical. It's certainly there in the end of Genesis chapter 1. But it's probably not likely to be viewed as a requirement to being a mature Christian.

[24 : 13] But it is possible to induce guilt. But maybe if you took a Sunday shift in a part-time job because you had to or maybe you're a medical practitioner or a nurse and your shift is put on a Sunday.

You think, wow, that was my Sabbath day, my day of rest but I can't do it. I'm less of a Christian now and it induces guilt. That might be something. Another one is Lent, a really common festival for

Christians Lent.

That's sort of a time of fasting. Real value. It's good to give up things, to sacrifice things, to help us focus on the Lord Jesus. That's a great thing to do. But there's a chance of making a really public showing of your sort of Lenting.

So I used to work in an office as an accountant and people would always talk about what they'd give up for Lent. It was always chocolate which seemed odd at Easter. What a bad time to give up. Chocolate.

Not for me. It was always lobster and caviar for me. So really taking up my cross and all that sort of stuff. But there is a chance, just a small chance, that a very sort of public showing of how much I'm giving up for Jesus might produce a bit of arrogance.

[25 : 26] It's sort of a harsh treatment of the body as Colossians talks about here. I'm denying myself all this lovely chocolate or all this other stuff because this is what makes me more Christian.

So that's those sorts of things that produces false humility. It could discourage baby Christians who think, wow, I don't, I'm still enjoying my caviar. What's going on?

You know, maybe I'm not a real Christian. So those sorts of things. That's Lent and sort of festivals like that. Here's another one which is, I think, very pointed. This is corporate confession.

So together when we meet, we often say a corporate confession which is right and good. But what would happen if for one, maybe you're late to church, sometimes the confession's at the beginning of the service.

Maybe you've had a terrible week and you think, I am less Christian until I get to that church service and I say the confession. Now my Christian juice is 100% again. I've sort of topped up on my Christian-ness because I said that confession.

[26 : 31] Do you ever do that? I do that. Here's the thing. Confession doesn't make you more Christian. It's not like you're less Christian when you walk in and suddenly all your Christian juice is topped up once you've said it.

Please hear me rightly. It's a good and right thing to do. It's appropriate that we clear the air with God given our past weeks or months, whatever it is. But if you missed corporate confession that week or maybe you're away on the week we did it, for example, would that induce a guilt in you? Would that shatter your confidence? Would you think you don't have more but less in Christ for that week going forward? That's corporate confession. Another one which is connected to this is obviously church attendance.

Really great to come to church. Really important. The Bible speaks about coming to church. Don't give up a summer in the habit of doing but of meeting. Important to come to serve others to be built up in Christ to celebrate Him which is something that doesn't happen out there.

Really important time, church. But is there a chance that the encouragement to attend church has gone from a good encouragement for growth to a measurement of someone's godliness?

[27 : 50] Have you found yourself wondering whether a person is absent for a while? Are they really a Christian anymore? It's a great challenge for me because I'm always in the morning services I'm making a note of who's here and who's not here every week.

Great challenge for me. Maybe it is for you as well. Do you feel more Christian because you turned up to church? Maybe your study routine or something happens and you couldn't make it that week. Do you feel guilt because you didn't turn up? That's church attendance. Jeff told me to put this one in and this is chicken and chips for 5pm. So these are Jeff's words.

Perhaps even things we do at church can now become religious festivals i.e. chicken and chips. I'm going to just quote Jeff here. Chicken and chips and after dinners at church are great.

They're a great tradition. I don't think we should change them. Jeff says they do good, don't they?

They create lots of opportunities for building relationships and growth. Jeff says I hope you come tonight.

[28 : 51] Please send Jeff an angry text that he's not here tonight. But if we find ourselves judging people who maybe maybe they've had a horrible week or they've got something they really have to do and they just for whatever reason they can't join us tonight.

Would we judge them? Oh they are not us. They're not joining us in chicken and chips. They always leave. Maybe they're scared socially. Maybe not everyone's as outgoing as you to just walk up and say Hi my name is so and so.

Maybe they're just nervous about the social situation and they find chicken and chips quite overwhelming. Do we judge people who don't turn up to social events or chicken and chips without really understanding why?

Paul says do not judge do not disqualify people if they don't do these certain practices. So here's a couple of questions that I want you to think about as application.

If you're writing making notes these are the ones to write down. What would you answer to this? I will be more fulfilled and complete as a Christian if I dot dot dot.

[30 : 01] I would be marked out as more devoted Christianly if I dot dot dot. I'll be considered an insider sorry an insider in this church if I did dot dot dot.

See that is the way that we can fall into the trap of what these Colossians did. They didn't realise that Jesus was everything. He's the full Spotify premium he's the full Encyclopedia Britannica faith in him links them to everything.

And along comes these people and says hey listen if you really want more do these new moon festivals these Sabbath rituals these corporate confessions these church attendances these chicken and chips these things like that.

It's not necessarily these are bad things but when they define what the more is you've moved away from the basic gospel in Jesus you have everything Jesus plus nothing is everything Jesus plus nothing is everything because chapter 1 says he is everything and so I'm going to finish now with verse 6 so then just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord continue to live your lives in him rooted and built up like a tree like a building strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness so I'm going to pray Father God we praise you that Jesus is everything and Father as long as we live would we never be tempted to move away from him would we continue in him rooted and built up would we grow deeper in him in our love for him and his people so that we can grow more outwardly help us to negotiate the tricky religious trappings that are attached to our faith many good practices

Father help us to navigate them well but never leaving the foundation of Christ who is everything in his name Amen