

Christ & Disinformation

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Date: 11 October 2020

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 00] Well, what a passage we have today. There is a lot in it, so we're just going to crack on with it. These young Christians in Colossae were likely experiencing some anxiety around their fledgling faith.

Anxiety about perhaps their inconsistency. Anxiety about... Now this is, let me say this, this is an anxiety we know about, right? But we think we're missing out on some level of Christianity. That, you know, some people are up here and we're kind of, we're a bit average, perhaps a bit below average. And these visiting teachers had turned up to this new church in Colossae and took advantage of this anxiety and basically said, well, you guys started pretty well, but if you want real spirituality, well, you should listen to us because we've discovered some hidden knowledge, some special ways that go beyond the gospel that you heard.

And Paul hears about this and he addresses it in our text. And Paul basically says two things. He says, first, here's how you really grow in faith. And secondly, here's how you avoid bogus spirituality.

So he says two things. First, here's how you really grow in faith. And here's how you avoid bogus spirituality. We'll start with how you grow in your faith. And that's verses 6 and 7, which are kind of a summary of the whole book, aren't they?

[1 : 31] Verses 6 and 7. As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted and built up, established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Do you see what Paul is saying here? As you received Christ the Lord, so walk in him. You have received into your life the King of kings, the power above all powers.

You've received him. Now walk in a way that is consistent with that. That means you come to every situation recognizing that Christ the Lord has authority in that situation.

The goal, of course, is to make Christ the Lord of all our human affairs. Now that sounds very ambitious, doesn't it? How do we get there? How do we move in that direction?

How do we grow in that way? Look at verse 7. Be rooted and built up in him. Do you see the two directions there? Rooted and built up.

[2 : 31] Think of a plant. The roots go down and the trunk goes up. The branches go up. I have a dwarf apple tree in my backyard. It will never be a big tree.

Why? Because the trunk of that tree was grafted onto a smaller plant's rootstock. The roots of a much smaller tree. So this one will never get big.

That's why my apple tree will always stay stunted. Because the roots just will never go down very far. So it can't grow up. Paul says you're only going to grow upwards as your roots go downwards into Christ.

We want to grow. And it's easy to look for growth in other things. The latest trendy spiritual practices for example.

And I think this was the issue with the church in Colossus. I think this is what they were facing. But unless those practices drive your spiritual roots directly into Christ. It's just window dressing at best.

[3 : 31] Or harmful at worst. Here's another way to think about it. What's the best way to build a strong and stable house? It's on a foundation of course isn't it? A foundation. You don't build a foundation and then start a wall over here.

You don't build your foundation and then start putting a few bricks over here do you? That's just complete madness. I'll read these verses again. As you've received Christ Jesus the Lord.

So walk in him. Rooted and built up in him. The way we grow is always consistent with our beginnings. Building on our foundation.

We grow in Christ. This is why Paul says be established in the faith just as you were taught it. Folks establish your faith in the centuries of theology that has been passed down to you.

I think this is a hallmark of the Spirit's work in your life. That you desire to learn the great doctrines of the church. The foundations of the church. You want to learn about your faith.

[4 : 35] Not the doctrines that are sort of acceptable today. The ones that land a bit easier in our culture. Then Paul says do this abounding in thanksgiving.

Why thanksgiving? Because the more you learn about Jesus. The more you grow in seeing his lordship in your life. You will see this is not some terrible burden.

This is not some great bondage in your life. The more you grow in seeing his lordship in your life.

You will discover you are not missing out. The more you know. The more it gets into your bones.

The more you realize the gospel is the greatest news you ever have heard.

And it is where there is life. Okay so let me summarize so far. And let me just speak very plainly here. Because I want to make sure you get this. There are a million spiritual practices out there.

And as you think about including them in your life. Out of a desire to grow. Think well. Be discerning.

[5 : 43] For example. The practice of Lectio Divina. It's a reflective way of reading the bible. It sounds cool. Old. It's got a Latin name. But you can do Lectio Divina in a way that takes you to Christ.

And you can do it in a way which it's just all about you. I'll give you another example. Podcasts.

Perhaps you like listening to Christian podcasts. And perhaps you like listening to podcasts that are Christian.

Christian-y. Christian-ish. And they tickle your ears. But folks. Unless they're deepening your roots in Christ. It's just spiritual air candy.

And could be harming you. Could be taking you away from Christ. Now next week's passage has a lot more about this type of thing. So we'll move on. So. Paul is talking about growing and establishing your faith.

And now in verse 8 he pivots. Actually 8 to 19 is a section. In that section Paul gives us three warnings to these young Christians. And in our passage we're going to deal with one of those warnings.

[6 : 50] The first warning. How to avoid bogus spirituality. 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. It's a terrible picture here Paul paints. It's a picture of someone kidnapping somebody else.

You know throwing a bag over their head. And binding their arms. And marching them across the desert. And selling them into slavery in a foreign land. Paul is recognizing the fact that. Someone can bring an idea to you.

That really rocks your faith. That has a demolishing effect. It steals something from you. It captures you. You're captured by it. And he's very concerned that this is happening in Colossae.

So these visiting teachers are in that city. And they're claiming to have discovered the secrets of the world. How everything sort of works. A way of understanding life.

[7 : 49] A unifying theory. That's very attractive isn't it? He's so worried that these ideas will captivate the Colossians.

That will so captivate them that they will sideline Christ. And focus on these techniques. Don't you feel like this happens all the time. To us in lots of really subtle ways.

Don't you feel like you're constantly bombarded with techniques. And life hacks. And two minutes. The two minute secret to a better this and that.

Or do this one weird trick. And everything will be okay. Don't you feel like we're just bombarded with ways of doing life. Ways of doing life. Techniques of doing life. That promise to make all things better. And I understand most of these things are sort of put together by people trying to be helpful. But it's so anxiety producing. Am I doing. Am I just doing everything wrong? It seems like I am. And sometimes the danger is we can get so into this stuff that it becomes the source of our peace and our identity.

[8 : 56] And not Christ. We can Marie Kondo our house. And it's helpful. But it really doesn't go deep enough, does it? To address our inner freak outs. Like Amy.

My wife and I are trying to do that right now. We're trying to purge a whole lot of stuff out of our house. But I'm still yelling at my kids too much. Like it's not actually. It's not delivering on the promise of peace.

Okay. So where am I? Where did that go? So we're talking about philosophies. Techniques that can distract us from Jesus. Or just misplace our hope.

So there's stuff we just talked about, right? All these life hacks, TED talks. There's that stuff.

Probably well-intentioned stuff. But there's other stuff out there.

Darker things. There are campaigns of disinformation that will purposely try and unsettle you. The goal is to upset you. The goal is to take you off course.

[9 : 59] Let me talk about modern warfare for just a moment. Modern warfare, and you probably know this, it's a dirty affair. In today's wars, it's not enough just to, it's not enough to hold territory.

It's not enough just to have boots on the ground. You've actually got to control the narrative. You've got to control the story of why you're there and the good, the good you're going to do by being there. It's why countries all over the world are building these troll farms.

They're hiring hundreds of people who just spam social media with disinformation. And there's these very advanced troll bots that analyse your social media habits. And they use it against you.

And it's just one nation trying to unsettle the citizens of another nation. For example, you might be looking for a job. And the AI of these troll bots sees that. And all of a sudden, you start seeing in your social media feed stories about migrants stealing jobs.

And these troll farms know when you're the most vulnerable to that kind of message. It's like 10.45 at night. Planting seeds of bitterness. Now, why am I telling you this?

[11 : 05] Because modern warfare is analogous to how heresies operate. It's disinformation. And it finds fertile ground in churches.

How? Because it plays to our insecurities. And it plays to our fears. And it played to these young Christians in Colossae. They were tempted to build their lives on something other than Christ.

Tempted because they started to believe that they were missing out on something. And how does Paul deal with this? What's his strategy? It's very interesting.

Instead of directly criticizing these false teachers here, he just holds up Christ. He just holds up the magnificence of Christ. And he says, this is who you're attempting to sideline.

The one in whom the fullness of deity dwells. That's who you're attempting to sideline. The one who is the head of all rule and authority.

[12 : 03] And Paul doesn't stop with just declaring Christ. He goes on to say what it means for us. Verse 9. All of God is in Christ.

And verse 10. And you have been filled with him. So, is Christ with God? Yes. So are you. Nothing can be added to that.

You can't be more with him. And Paul uses pictures of circumcision and baptism to say a couple of things. He says, did Christ get judged for you? Yes.

Then you are no longer under God's wrath. Did Christ get raised from the dead? Yes. Then you have been given new life. You've been given eternal life.

Listen. You can't get more eternal life. Now look at verse 14. It's wonderful.

[13 : 00] By cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. When the Romans would crucify someone, they would nail, they'd put a sign above the heads of the crucified person, and they'd say the crime or describe the crime or say the crime to deter others, obviously.

Those sins in your life, perhaps committed years ago, are written on that sign above Christ's name. Think about that.

Name it in your head right now. See it written down. See it written down above Christ's bloodied head. Did Christ die for your sins?

Yes. There is no forgiveness plus. There's no bonus forgiveness. There's forgiveness. Where are your accusers, folks?

Where are your accusers? Look at verse 15. He disarmed them. Christ disarmed your accusers. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

[14 : 14] Again, do you see how often it says in him? This is the foundation stuff again in the passage. Where are your accusers? That voice that shames you has been disarmed. These enemies had one weapon.

They had one weapon. It was shame, and that's been taken away from them. They have been triumphed over, and such was a victory. Paul describes it. It's like, you know, in ancient warfare, they would defeat another country, and then they would march the defeated generals into their home city in a big parade.

That's what Paul's describing it. That's the picture. We are free from shame. Folks, there is a great campaign of spiritual disinformation out there, and its target is your identity in Christ.

Your enemy does not want you to know what you have in Christ. If they can convince you into thinking you're missing out on something, they have leverage.

For example, they might be able to convince you through disinformation. They might be able to convince you that you're not completely in Christ or you're not completely forgiven, and what they do is they can slot something.

[15 : 22] They can slot something in that little gap that they see, and depending on your personality type, you could be vulnerable to something more sort of weird, esoteric theology, or you could be more vulnerable to sort of like a hard-line, rules-based religion, and they slot something into that gap, and sooner or later, that thing that gets slotted into that gap, sooner or later, that thing becomes the central thing, and Christ is sidelined.

That's how it works. Folks, you have everything in Christ. You have everything in Christ. I want to finish up here. I was really encouraged last week.

David talked about writing down all the things we should be thankful for. It's a great practice. I've been thinking about that this week. I've been doing that. It's been very helpful. This week, I think Paul is speaking to people who have been made fearful.

They've been made to think that they're somehow missing out, that they're not complete. Perhaps something you could do this week. As well as being thankful, perhaps you could consider your fears.

What are your great fears in life? Whatever they are, articulate them, name them, write them down, and then consider who Christ is.

[16 : 47] Consider what you have in him, and you can cross those fears out one at a time. As I considered it this week, I thought, what are my great fears?

Well, there's lots. You know what one of them is? It's the fear of feeling common. It's the fear of being unremarkable.

And it's a murky one, isn't it? Well, what does Christ say to me? He says lots of things to me, but here's one of them. The God who created the blue whale and the Andromeda system says to me, be my ambassador in the world.

The kingdom of God is breaking into the world, and you can be in on that. Folks, there are no common Christians, because I am in Christ, and he is in me.

Amen.