

Rooted and Built Up, Established in the Faith

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[0 : 00] 15. Now I hear God's word. 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.

16. 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.

17. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.

18. Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also 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 cancelling the record of our debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

[1 : 32] This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

Well, so far we have seen that the only way a person can be free, that is truly free, is to belong to Christ Jesus.

This is a freedom to and a freedom from. It is a freedom from sin in order to live for God in a fallen world.

And that relationship or that understanding of freedom is really the basis here of how we're to understand that therefore, in verse 6, of what it means to now live out in application the maturity that we have in Christ Jesus, or actually to become mature.

And so freedom always has to be understood as what we're free from and what we are free to do in Christ Jesus. If not, then we have a skewered view of what the freedom we have actually received and what it actually means for Christian households, Christian businesses, Christians wherever they may be at any point in time.

[2 : 57] This idea of freedom is really important to understand. An example of how this freedom works in terms of an application, I'll give you an illustration.

C.S. Lewis, when he used to teach how to write, he used to explain to his students that the writer has to take a reader down a long path and then the conclusion is, of course, the final gate at the end.

And it's the writer's job to make sure that the reader doesn't go off any side roads on the way down or you'll never get the reader to where you want him or her to be.

You'll never get them to that position. And so the job of the writer is to write in such a way where the side roads have a no exit sign to them.

Don't go down there. Don't be deceived. Don't take that road. And all the time, not only do you have to say, this is the path that I want you to follow, you have to at the same time say, I don't want you to take these side roads.

[4 : 08] And this is difficult because you're constant. There's no, you can't set anyone off to just walk in a way where they can follow Christ without there being interruptions somewhere along the way.

Now, we've all experienced, perhaps we've all experienced, the moment where we're traveling down a road and we get to a crossroads and we're not quite sure which one to take. Well, the same is exactly the same, spiritually speaking, that we're walking with Christ and we can often take roads

off to the side, not thinking that there's any dangers down there or that they're going to lead us away from Jesus Christ.

Paul calls these deceptions, empty deceit, the philosophies of what people would want to do to take you away from Christ Jesus.

Now, of course, the Christian who doesn't notice them, the Christian who doesn't see them, cannot help but end up following down a path that they are not meant to go down.

Jesus Christ said, I am the way, the truth, and the light. Follow me. Easier said than done. And, of course, what Paul is explaining here is the application of how a Christian is to walk.

[5 : 27] He's moved beyond how you were saved. The application is now how you are to walk as a saved person.

And he comes back in the latter part where he talks about, again, that through Christ's death and resurrection, you also have experience to death and resurrection.

So Paul's job is that of the writer, that he knows that as he looks at this young church, he has to get them from where they are to where God wants them to be, and at the same time deal with all the side roads that seek to take these young believers away from walking with God.

I guess, in a nutshell, that's the role of everyone who declares the word of God. Every pastor who declares the word of God, he's trying to keep God's people on God's path, warning them against the side roads that they are not to go down.

We learned last week also that a profession of faith is just not enough, that it's not a sign of maturity to simply point back to a conversion date.

[6 : 41] That doesn't, it doesn't, it's a bit like a COVID test. When you get the results, you know on that day you don't have it, but what about the next day? You know, it's like the CRB test.

You know, they go out, you get a report back, yeah, there's no criminal record, but what about after that? So, all tests only work only up to the point of which you have been tested. Beyond that, they don't tell you anything.

Well, Paul doesn't allow that type of definition entering to the Christian life, as if to say, well, you've got a conversion date, great. Now, a profession of faith is not enough.

It's not enough because your conversion date, or the point at which you repent and believe, and come to Christ, you're just at the very beginning of the road, you're not at the end.

And now you have to walk this Christian life. So, here's the summary. Who we are in Christ Jesus matters a great deal. This is what Paul wants us to know, that you are to understand what it means for you to belong in Christ, that you have fullness, and that you have complete freedom.

[7 : 53] That can never be taken away from you, but that doesn't mean that you can't wander down a path that you shouldn't go down. So, verse 8, because of who you are, don't let anyone take you captive.

Don't let anyone take you down those side roads. Don't let anyone lead you away from following Christ Jesus. The reason? Because only in Christ Jesus is there fullness in freedom.

Verse 9. And the same power that raised Christ Jesus from the dead is at work in you. God forgave you through the person of Christ Jesus.

Jesus paid a debt he didn't owe. He paid your debts. He paid my debts. And our debts are now cancelled.

They are nailed to the cross. Now, that may sound like a strange statement, but what it means is this, that when a criminal hung on a Roman cross, their crime would be nailed above them.

[8 : 55] That's what it would say. Hence why, you know, Jesus, you know, king of the Jews. Well, of course, that was true.

He's king of everyone. But when we look at the cross, we see our debts nailed there. And we see Christ nailed there. But we are never nailed there.

And that's what Paul is saying. Your debts were nailed to the cross when Christ was nailed to the cross of which you never have to face. You're free from that judgment.

You never have to face that, ever. So any debt that you have amounted up thus far has been paid for. And any debt that you're going to incur in terms of sins that you're going to commit after today have also been paid for and nailed to the cross of Christ Jesus.

Now, that doesn't mean, right, I can now go ahead and do as I please. What it means is to get you to understand the kind of accomplishment that Jesus Christ has accomplished for you.

[10:01] That every single debt, past, present, and future, has been nailed to the cross and dealt with. That, therefore, there's nothing that can separate you now from Christ Jesus.

That is how firm and solid your salvation is. That Christ paid debts he didn't owe. All debts of all time for his people.

So Christ has won the victory. But, of course, on the day of the crucifixion, it does not look like Christ has won anything. It looks as if the victory belonged to the Sanhedrin or even to the Romans, they won.

What are we to do with this person who calls himself the Christ? Let's kill him. Let's crucify him. It doesn't look like Christ won. It looked like they won.

But, of course, this person who is the Christ is the victor, is the one who is actually winning and accomplishing much on the cross.

[11:05] And that is what Paul would have us see. But you have to remember that the cross is much easier to preach today than it was back in Paul's day. Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.

The cross is a very difficult thing to preach back then because everyone understood that the cross, unlike today, where it has this symbolic meaning of Christianity or salvation, the cross never meant that in Paul's day.

It meant he's a criminal. That's a cursed person who hangs on a tree. Where a cross is today that people wear around their necks symbolizes something quite different, Christianity or Christ Jesus or resurrection.

Who knows? No one. Who knows? But the cross back then, you had to overcome this mindset of cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.

that how can there be victory there? And Paul said, no, that is exactly where the victory is because your debts were nailed in that judgment.

[12:11] Therefore, verse six is where he begins. Now, given what Christ has done for you, become mature. Work this out. Now, in order, before I can get on to the structure of maturity or how a church becomes mature, I want to run a little thought experiment of what would you do?

Now, when we used to take on ministry trainees, we used to put them through a series of questions. And when we sit on ordination panels in order for other men to become ministers, we have to develop questions that are both difficult and rigorous so that they can be answered.

One of the questions that I was asked at my ordination was what would you do if a Muslim was converted to Christianity who had two wives?

What would you do? And you had to have your understanding of the gospel and then, well, practically, how do I work this out? Okay? Difficult questions. So these what would you do are really important for understanding what you would actually do given the circumstances.

So I want you to imagine for a moment, for a moment, just to understand how maturity works, I want you to imagine that you had 100,000 Christians or more on a brand new planet.

[13:33] You had nothing on TV which was sinful. Okay? You had nothing in the shops which were sinful. You had, okay, there's nothing externally sinful, but you've got over 100,000 Christians up there.

You've got the law of God. There's no other government other than the law of God and God's word to govern these 100,000 or more believers in the faith.

Okay? In that environment, what would you do when you have your first divorce? What would you do when you have your first marriage breakdown?

What would you do when someone drinks too much for the first time and becomes an alcoholic after? What would you do? And what I'm trying to demonstrate to you is that when you actually consider that if we take all the Christians out of this world and put them into a brand new planet where there was none of these external sinful influences, you've still got the Christians themselves to deal with who have these sinful desires.

So sinful desires do not come to us externally because of the environment that we live in. They come to us and through us because we're not quite sure how to handle our own sinful desires.

[14:55] So what would you do? Would you be the type of person who struggles and contends with Christians so that a marriage wouldn't fall apart, families wouldn't fall apart, a person wouldn't... Or would you sit back and go, I'm not getting involved?

Now, of course, there are two types of people in that scenario. One who says, no, we need to address this. And the other one who says, it's none of my business. The point here is to recognize that if you do nothing, everything declines. Everything declines. Even... We live in a world where the moment something is built, it's then in decline. The moment you are born, you mature, but then your bodies are in decline. We cannot help but understand that as we live in this world, everything is in decline. The law of entropy means that everything breaks down and comes to nothing. And so maturity must begin with what the Christian is going to be committed to.

[16:01] Because even in a perfect environment where you can have the breakdown of families and marriages and businesses and our personal walk with the Lord, what would you do?

At that point, what are you going to do? Now, we don't live in that kind of world where we don't have any external pressures. The world we live in is far more complicated, far more sinful, and far more devastating to the lives of people.

And so if you have a breakdown in a perfect environment, how much more are you likely to have a breakdown in an imperfect environment, in a fallen environment?

So one of the things that we must be mindful of here is the idea of what it means to thrive, what it means to be mature, what it means to grow.

And I've heard people say, Christians say to me, that church is a growing church, it's a thriving church, just go to it on a Sunday morning. And yet when you look at it and you look at its history, it's got history with drug abuse, it's got alcoholism, families have broken down, marriages have broken down, families have split.

[17:12] That's not thriving. That's not even close to thriving. That's a tragedy. That's not a thriving church. And so we cannot judge anything by a Sunday morning service.

We can only judge it by the measurement that God has given us to judge anything. And that is, are the believers themselves rooted, built up, and established in Christ?

Verse 7. And this is the basis of everything that Paul is getting to. Verse 6. Therefore, as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk in him, rooted, built up, and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

And so he takes us on to maturity. Now we're, now what does it mean now to mature? It means that I don't look to external verification.

I look to what I can cope with in a world that wants to take me apart. What does the mature church look like? It looks like a church that cannot be taken apart by the sins and ills of the world.

[18:25] That's what it looks like. It doesn't look like 300 people and nowhere to sit. That's not what it looks like. It has never looked like that. And so if we're going to define what healthiness is, we have to understand what it looks like.

So when people come into the dining room in the manse, and it's just, I know it's a mess because there's books everywhere piled up on the floor, and people go, well, you must, you must, you must know a lot to have all these books, you know, and, you know, for a moment I sit back and go, yeah, just, I'll just take that in because that's, and I think, well, no, what I want you to do is I want you to imagine that all of those books are oxygen tanks.

Would you then look at me as a healthy person? No, you would look at me as a person who's highly dependent on all of these things, all of these tanks. Well, that's why I have books.

I have books written by lots and lots of different people because I'm dependent on other people, because I don't know. Those books are not a sign of my maturity. They're the sign of my immaturity and my need to learn from others.

That's the point. So sometimes we tend to look at things and come to the wrong conclusions immediately because we have the wrong forms of measurement. And this is what Paul, is trying to get us to understand here.

[19:53] The right form of measurement is are you rooted, are you being built up, and are you established in the faith? And the connection here is the same between seed and plant.

So the faith in a four-year-old is exactly the same faith in a 64-year-old. The maturity level is entirely different. You'd hope the maturity level is entirely different, but not in every case.

But you understand that as you receive Christ Jesus, so you walk in him. The ongoing faith is identical to the initial faith. The ongoing faith is identical to the initial faith in the same way the plant is identical to the seed.

It's not the same thing, but the plant comes out of the seed. It doesn't become something else as though the seed and the plant have no connection whatsoever. And this is what Paul is trying to get you to understand in verses 6 and 7.

You have a seed and you have a plant. The maturity that you expect can only come out of what you have received in Christ Jesus. So a four-year-old expressing faith in Christ Jesus will look nothing like a 44, 45-year-old expressing faith in Christ Jesus.

[21 : 10] It's different, but it's the same faith, but the maturity level is entirely different. And this is what Paul would have you understand.

The mature person is not easily fooled. They're not going to be the ones that are taken down the side roads, but will be ones who have their feet firmly fixed on the path that they are to follow. And this is what Paul is saying here, that the only way to keep a believer on the right path is not by closing the side doors, which is the external difference.

Well, let's keep our people, let's keep our children, let's keep our wives, let's keep our husbands, let's keep them away from those things as a means of keeping them on the road.

No, Paul is the complete opposite. Leave those things alone and concentrate on the person. Get the person rooted, built up, and mature, and then they will decide themselves not to go down that road.

[22 : 14] Don't go closing doors ahead of them because that isn't what will keep them mature or make them mature. It may prevent certain consequences, and that's great, perhaps you should do that as well, but that's not a way a person becomes mature by saying everything is a no entry.

The way a person becomes mature is by them deciding I shouldn't go down there. And therefore, verse 7, that the way to become mature is to be rooted, built up, and established in Christ Jesus. So the transformation that the Christian goes through is the same as what Christ has actually accomplished, this death and resurrection, that who I am now, this new seed developing into a plant, this new being, is not who I was.

I've died, I've gone into the ground like seeds do and die. And now what comes forth is new life. And the new life is a product of that death and that what Christ has accomplished for us.

So I want you to understand the only way to have that fullness, that freedom, and that growth is to recognize that you can only ever get it on the way in Christ Jesus rather than down a side road.

[23 : 35] And it's very tempting to think, as it was for these Christians who were easily convinced to think that you can get it from somewhere else when you can't.

And so the lesson to understand here for all of us is that we have not been forgiven in order to run up a debt. We have not been forgiven in order to sort of spend money in that sense and run up a debt and say, hey, you know, I can live as I please now because every debt is cancelled.

No, the idea of maturity is so that we would recognize that we have been freed from demonic powers. We have been freed from the bondage of sin.

We have been freed from those things in order to live for Christ. Meaning that our freedom is another way of demonstrating that those things do not have power over us and if they do as a Christian it's because you're letting it and if they do and you're not a Christian it's because you've got no other option.

The only way demonic powers and these evil influences and the bondage of sin works is that if you're not a Christian you cannot help it because you're in you're bound to sin and if you are a Christian then you're letting it happen and that's what Paul is saying and therefore not an excuse you can't say well this isn't avoidable it's completely avoidable.

[25 : 05] So here's the conclusion and exhortation as we close. If we are to understand the power of the gospel then we have to understand that it doesn't just save a person but it makes that person mature in the faith.

That Christ is made peace by the blood of his cross but by the power of his life death and resurrection we can now grow up to become established in the faith and when something is established like a tree in compared to a young sapling it can withstand more from the world.

It has the strength to do so and so becoming established in the faith is not just affirming that you believe in Jesus Christ not just affirming that I'm a Christian but it is being root up being built up rooted built up and established and Paul's language is purposeful.

He's trying to lay it on thick so that you would understand that the progression that you're to make in Christ Jesus is never beyond Christ Jesus as if now that I'm saved I now move on to other things.

Now the progression you make the maturity you make is within the person of Christ and that we would do this without adopting any of the practices of the world.

[26 : 28] Okay well here's the exhortation what does it mean? What does it mean to be exhorted in this way? Well it means if I'm to exhort you to become mature I'm not to tell you and focus too much on the dangers out there in the world as though don't do this don't do this don't do this perhaps one of the reasons why Christianity has an image and message of things you cannot do is because it hasn't concentrated on maturity in the way that it ought to have done where it focuses on what a person can be and is in Christ Jesus what they are free to do and so if you don't understand that the only message you are left with is all the things you cannot do stay away from these things well that's not to say that that message is wrong it's just to say that it's a disjointed view of what's actually being taught of what it actually means to walk and follow Christ you are to be rooted seed and plant built up and established in Christ

Jesus and so when I mentioned those things earlier which I now come back to those things which fall apart because of social ills and sin and you have families breaking down you have marriages breaking down you have people's persons personal walk with the Lord breaking down and they're Christians you need to know that's not inevitable that's not inevitable they are choices bad choices that have led to that if we're going to take seriously the power of the cross if we're going to take seriously the power of Jesus and the accomplishment of Jesus Christ then we have to say that we are free from those things that causes families marriages children alcoholism and people to fall away from the Lord we are free from those things happening and therefore if they do happen is because we've gone down side roads rather than staying on the main road now this is easy of course to explain in an uncomplicated world where everyone is a Christian the trouble is not everyone is a Christian and not every Christian is married to a Christian and so now you've got additional complications where you're going to have to how does this work what does this mean when one person is being rooted and built up and established in Christ and the other one isn't well it's inevitable that you're going to have tensions along that line the point here that

Paul is making is that freedom in Christ is to be understood that things that you might consider inevitable are not inevitable they are choices they are bad choices and are out we have no freedom if they're inevitable it means that we have no freedom from them we're not free from falling apart we're not free from things breaking down if we don't have if that's the kind of freedom that you want to define that's not freedom and so what Paul is establishing here is no fullness and freedom that we have we have in Christ Jesus it's a freedom for things to be built up it's a freedom of restoration it's a freedom of new creation you can't get any of this from the idea that conversion takes things apart conversion is a new creation it builds it plants it restores it redeems everything is being put back together and therefore if we're to understand the freedom that we have received in Christ Jesus we have to admit that things that fall apart within our life as Christians are not inevitable they are choices bad choices and therefore the exhortation is fairly simple fullness and freedom can only be found in Christ Jesus therefore the exhortation is a plea for the church to become mature so that you would be rooted so that you would be built up and that you would be established in the faith may God bless you and may God keep you in the hearing of his word well before we come to the doxology for this morning let's listen to our final song screen what you you you you you