

The Supremacy of Christ Understanding the Gospel Colossians 2:4-7

Introduction

Our study of Colossians is a letter from one of the early Christian movement leaders. Paul, the apostle, writes this letter while imprisoned in Rome for preaching the gospel. But even in prison, he continues to preach the gospel and guide the Christians in Colossae towards spiritual maturity.

Last week in Chapter 1, Paul called all Christians to help one another toward spiritual maturity in verses 28 and 29. In Chapter 2, he discusses his efforts to help the Colossian Christians and other nearby churches to reach spiritual maturity. In verse 1, he writes, "For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh" (Col 2:1 NKJV) The word "conflict" is the same word as "striving" that Paul uses in verse 29 of Chapter 1.

Paul gives a partial description of spiritual maturity when he writes, "that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col 2:2-3 NKJV)

Then in verse 4, Paul reveals some critical ingredients of spiritual maturity. An ingredient isn't the finished product; it is an element that is essential to get the finished product. Paul rejoices that the Colossians already have some of these ingredients. However, they lack other ingredients, so he urges them to give attention to these. The Holy Spirit knows we need to know what these ingredients are because if we lack them, we will not be able to mature or help others mature.

In verse 4, Paul writes, "Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your *good* order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As you, therefore, have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving." (Col 2:4-7 NKJV)

The first ingredient is making Jesus the Lord and Master of your life.

I. Commit to Making Jesus Your Lord and Master

Spiritual maturity requires receiving Jesus Christ as Lord. In verse 6, Paul says, "As you, therefore, have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Col 2:6 NKJV)

You can't mature spiritually until you are born spiritually. And the only way to born spiritually is by receiving Christ Jesus as Lord. What does that mean? It means you accept that Jesus is the one who saves you and gives you eternal life. You don't have to know all of the details of His birth and ministry and execution and resurrection life, but you do need to acknowledge who He is.

Jesus isn't one of many ways to meet God. Nor is He merely a good moral teacher. Jesus is *the* Christ, the Messiah. He is God in human flesh, sent to redeem us from sin and restore us to our created purpose. God planned for Jesus to come, and He predicted it by the Old Testament prophets.

Jesus' death paid for our sins, and He promised to return to establish God's rule over all humanity. Jesus is the one and only one who is qualified to be the rightful Ruler of your life. It means that you must make a conscious decision to receive Jesus. "Receive" means to take for oneself. It's the same word used in Matthew 1:24 when it says, "Joseph took Mary as his wife." It means to welcome someone into your home. It's more than growing up in a Christian family. It's more than just believing intellectually that Jesus is the Christ. It's more than merely attending or becoming a member of a church. It means that you take the resurrected Jesus as your Messiah and welcome Him into your heart and life. Acts 4:12 says, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Act 4:12 NKJV)

When you receive Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to live in your heart and give you the desire and ability to mature spiritually. If you are interested in a fulfilling life and hope to live forever, you must embrace the first ingredient of total commitment to Christ.

II. Commit to Learning More About Christ

"As you, therefore, have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Col 2:6 NKJV)

Once you receive Christ, you need to "walk in Him," which is a synonym for growing spiritually. How do we walk in Him? Verse 7 says, "rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving." (Col 2:7 NKJV)

Before you can become a good teacher, how many of you know you must be a good student. A devoted Christian is not just a person who attends church regularly. You must commit to the ongoing teaching and training in the New Testament message about who Jesus is and what He requires of you. The Bible is the textbook God has given to us to learn what we need to know to inherit eternal life. How can you become a devoted Christian and teach others if you never study the textbook of life? Just as a baby will not develop properly without healthy nutrition, spiritual babes in Christ can not develop properly without a spiritual nourishment regimen.

Paul describes two stages of this crucial ingredient, with two different metaphors. First, he says we need to be "rooted." "Rooted" is an agricultural term from the Ancient Greeks meaning "mass of roots," describing the subterranean plant stem that sends out roots and shoots.

Plants need to develop a healthy root system to grow to maturity. In the same way, new Christians also need to develop a good root system. You do this by getting solid instruction in the basics of what Jesus did for you on the Cross, especially that He forgave you completely. When your faith is rooted in what Jesus did for you on the Cross, you will have a stable basis for development. Without Jesus and the Cross, your spiritual relationship with God will be very unstable. You will tend to believe that God loves you and accepts you based on how obedient you've been lately. Or, you might tend to interpret adverse circumstances as God's punishment or think God has abandoned you. To be rooted and grounded in your faith, you need solid teaching about Jesus, something Paul shares with us as we progress through this letter.

Paul also says we need to be "built up and established." These are *architectural* terms that refer to building a structure on a foundation that has already been laid. "Being rooted" is stated in the perfect tense as something that has already been completed in the past. "Built-up and established" are stated in the present (ongoing) tense.

In other words, we need to keep adding to our understanding of the gospel for the rest of our lives. What Jesus has done for us is so vast that we may never reach a complete comprehension of it. In Ephesians 3:8, Paul calls them "the unfathomable riches of Christ." In Ephesians 3:18,19, he prays for the Ephesian Christians to comprehend the scope of Christ's love, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (Eph 3:17-19 NKJV)

A healthy Christian life is like watching the end of the movie "National Treasure." We keep seeing more and more of the treasures Christ has stored up for us. And the more we see, the more impressed and thankful we become until we are overflowing with gratitude to Christ. This is probably the most crucial ingredient in spiritual maturity.

Unfortunately, many Christians do not continue to grow in faith and never become built up and established in their relationship with God. They settle for being rooted only. They think they understand the gospel when they've only scratched the surface. It's easy for them to lose their thankfulness and joy or even develop an attitude of entitlement. Some actually resent God. And as a result, they do not develop the strength they need to keep maturing.

That makes you vulnerable to all kinds of spiritual dysfunction. Don't let this happen to you! Keep growing in this crucial area! Keep praying for Holy Spirit

illumination. Keep learning and meditating on passages of scripture that emphasize God's love and purpose for His creation.

Thirdly, you must develop a resistance to spiritual deception.

III. Develop a Resistance to Spiritual Deception

In verse 4, Paul says, "Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words." (Col 2:4 NKJV)

And in verse 8, he says, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ." (Col 2:8 NKJV)

We do not live in a spiritually positive or even neutral environment. Satan has sent out many demonic spirits into the world who want to neutralize you so your faith will fail, and you will not be able to influence others to follow Jesus. Satan doesn't usually try to neutralize you by directly attacking you. He usually tries to neutralize you by deception and working through very persuasive people!

The Colossians were facing this kind of religious deception. Teachers were re-inventing Jesus in ways that denied His deity and minimized the importance of His death. Verse 10 says, "and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the Cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it." (Col 2:10-15 NKJV)

They also advocated false spiritual practices, which we'll talk about next week. These same kinds of religious deceptions are still operative today. Satan loves to use deception that can sabotage your spiritual maturity. He uses substance abuse, romantic relationships that compromise God's moral will, greed, toys, clothes, career advancement, you name it. If you have a price, Satan will pay it. He is willing to do whatever it takes to convince you that God doesn't really exist, or He doesn't really care about you, or He can't be trusted. Over the years, many people have fallen prey to these forms of deception and failed to become mature disciples. It is heart-breaking and very sobering.

According to the scriptures, we must develop resistance to spiritual deception. And the best defense is a good offense! So, keep growing in your faith and in the knowledge of the gospel, and you will be more aware of deception and less

attracted to it. Practice critical thinking. Listen for the beliefs and values that are being communicated where you work and at school, or through the media, and consciously compare them to what the Bible says. Over time, using your brain to think critically and biblically trains our senses to detect evil and falsehood.

Remember, the Bible says that "solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb 5:14 NKJV)

IV. Fellowship with other Christians

And finally, the most important way to protect yourself against deception is to practice the truth and hang out with those who do! In verse 5, Paul says, "For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your *good* order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ." (Col 2:5 NKJV)

Paul rejoices because the Colossian Christians already have this in place. Fellowship makes a very powerful bond. Friends who stick by each other and families that watch out for each other are not easily defeated.

Unfortunately, our English translations don't completely convey what Paul is referring to. Both of these phrases draw from a military background. "Good order" (*taxis*) means "in the right order" or in "formation." Paul pictures the stability of your faith as "a solid military front." He describes the Colossian church as the Roman army marching in formation. They were protected from deception and defeat because they were not isolated. They were knit together in the unifying love of Christ.

The Colossian church was an organized network of caring relationships that were close enough they could watch one another's backs. They met regularly with their Christian friends to prayerfully read and discuss biblical truth and help one another apply it to their lives.

God created us to live in fellowship. Fellowship with Him and fellowship with each other. We cannot survive in isolation. Apart from God, your views become distorted, and your behaviors become destructive. As difficult and frustrating as some Christians can be, we still need one another. The good news of the gospel helps us to understand that.

Conclusion

Are you isolating yourself from God and other believers? Is there anyone you meet with regularly to deepen your faith in Christ. Is there anyone that you trust to share your struggles, fears, doubts, etc.? Are you able to take correction, or does it make you defensive? Do you have someone's back? Do they have yours? This is how deception gets nipped in the bud, and this is how we grow toward maturity!

Each of these ingredients is necessary. Excelling in one ingredient will not make up for weakness or omission of another. Spiritual maturity requires progress in each of these areas. So, which ingredient in your life needs the most work - Because that's an excellent place to start! And while you're growing in faith, reach out and help others do this same.