

“ROOTED AND BUILT UP IN CHRIST”

I. Introduction

- A. In these verses, we begin to see how Paul connects the grand theology that he set forth in the first part of this letter to the lives of these Christians in Colossae (and, of course, to our lives as well).
 - 1. This is an excellent example of Paul’s pastoral approach.
 - 2. He begins with objective theological facts.
 - 3. Then he uses those facts as the foundation for how Christians ought to live.
 - 4. This is an extremely important principle.
 - 5. Our identity in Jesus Christ is to determine how we live.
 - 6. Our theology needs to shape and govern our practices.
- B. As we study this text tonight, we will consider it under three headings.
 - 1. First, there is an exhortation to walk in the same Christ whom we have received.
 - 2. Second, there is warning not to be taken captive by human tradition.
 - 3. And third, there is a reminder that we have been filled in Christ.

II. An Exhortation: Walk in Christ

- A. Our passage begins with the first imperative in the epistle to the Colossians, the command to walk in Christ.

1. Up to this point, Paul has not been issuing commands.
 2. Instead, he has been focusing on reminding the Colossians of who they are in Christ.
 3. This is a general pattern that can be seen in Paul's other letters, a pattern that is sometimes described by using two of the grammatical terms that identify the mood of a verb: the terms 'indicative' and 'imperative.'
 4. Verbs in the indicative mood simply describe something that is.
 5. Verbs in the imperative mood issue a command.
 6. In general, Paul begins his letters in the indicative mood.
 7. That is, he states what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.
 8. Only after making this clear does he move on to the imperatives of the Christian life.
 9. This reminds us that the starting point for the Christian life is the finished work of Christ.
 10. We always need to remember that our obedience is the result, not the cause, of the blessings that God pours out upon us in Christ.
- B. Paul's command to walk in Christ comes in the second half of a comparative statement which begins with the phrase, "as you received Christ Jesus the Lord."
1. This establishes a vital connection between our initial salvation and its continued outworking in our life.
 2. The salvation that we initially receive when we believe in Christ is the salvation in which we are to walk for the rest of our days.

3. In other words, we will never get to a point where we move on to something new.

C. Paul's use of the word "receive" is especially significant here.

1. In the first century, this term was specifically used to refer to "the receiving of something delivered by tradition." [Bruce]
2. For example, the Judaism of Paul's day was committed to the transmission and safeguarding of traditions that were orally received and passed on.
3. Some of those traditions were manmade and went against Scripture.
4. This is what Jesus was confronting when he rebuked the Pharisees, saying, "You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men." (Mark 7:8 ESV)
5. While that kind of tradition is obviously problematic, Paul was committed to the preservation and proclamation of the apostolic tradition.
6. As he said in his first epistle to the Corinthians, "Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you." (1 Cor 11:2 ESV)
7. The Colossians had received Christ by receiving the apostolic tradition, which came to them through the apostle Paul's associate, Epaphras.
8. In that first century context, the apostolic tradition was primarily delivered orally since the New Testament was still being written.
9. In our day, the New Testament is our source for the apostolic tradition.

- D. Paul's words in verse 6 remind us that the Christian life should conform to the teaching that we have received.
1. Our approach to the life of discipleship ought to be one of reception and response, not one of innovation and construction.
 2. This is why we use a confession of faith, the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, to summarize and define what we believe.
 3. While these documents are not God's Word, they help summarize and organize what God's Word says.
 4. They are tools to help us preserve the apostolic testimony about Christ.
 5. They help us remember that when we become a part of the church, we receive Jesus Christ as he has been proclaimed throughout the ages.
 6. The Christian faith is a received faith, and the Christian life is to be built upon that received faith.
- E. Paul's linkage of receiving Christ with walking in Christ demonstrates that there should be a close connection between our doctrine and our practice of the faith.
1. The Christ of Scripture is to guide all of our thinking and all of our conduct.
 2. This is further elaborated by the things that Paul says in verse 7.
 3. We need to remain rooted in Christ, because he is our source of life.
 4. We need to be built up in Christ, because God wants us to grow towards greater maturity.
 5. We need be established and grounded in the truth that we have received, because if we are not we will be blown about by every

wind of doctrine.

6. And we need to abound in thanksgiving for God's grace, because ingratitude will make us susceptible to the allure of other things.

III. A Warning: Don't Be Taken Captive

- A. This brings us to the warning that Paul issues in verse 8.
 1. Here we see that walking in Christ also requires that we be on guard against falsehood.
 2. Paul warns the Colossians that they must not allow themselves to be taken "captive by philosophy and empty deceit."
 3. This is not referring to philosophy in general, but to a specific kind of philosophy, one that was according to human tradition and the "elemental spirits of the world."
 4. This raises a question: what does Paul mean by the phrase "elemental spirits of the world"?
 5. A literal translation of the Greek would be something like "elements of the world," or "rudiments of the world."
 6. The phrase was used in the ancient world to refer to the fundamental components of the universe, which in Paul's day were believed to be air, earth, fire, and water.
 7. It was also used to refer to the rudimentary principles in some aspect of life, or in some field of study.
 8. This is how Paul uses the phrase in his epistle to the Galatians, where it refers to both Jewish and pagan ceremonies and moral codes.
- B. The context in Colossians leads many interpreters to conclude that Paul has something else in mind when he uses this phrase here.

1. In light of the mention of “worship of angels” in 2:18, along with the other references to spiritual powers in the letter, it could be that Paul is talking about a form of Jewish mysticism that was influenced by pagan mystery religions.
 2. Those who promoted this teaching said that the stars were angelic beings who governed and upheld the world, and who therefore functioned as necessary intermediaries between man and God.
 3. The false teachers in Colossae may have been telling the believers there that it was important for them to pay reverence to these astral powers if they wanted to enjoy deep fellowship with God.
 4. Paul denounces this philosophy as “empty.”
 5. He does so because it was attempting to supplant Christ, the one in whom all the fullness of God dwells.
 6. Also, in contrast to the apostolic tradition through which the Colossians had “received” Christ, this philosophy was mere human tradition.
 7. It was constructed, rather than received.
- C. We may not be tempted to worship angels (though there certainly are people in the world today who are).
1. We do have to deal with the temptation to believe that the Jesus who is revealed to us in the Bible is not enough for us.
 2. This is a temptation that can come in a variety of forms.
 3. In the ancient and medieval periods, this temptation took shape in the teaching that said that Christians need the intercession of saints and of the Virgin Mary in order for their prayers to be effective.
 4. In the Pentecostal and charismatic movements, this temptation has found expression in the claim that Christians should seek a “second blessing” after conversion in order to have a deeper experience of

God.

5. And in the past few years, this temptation has been seen in a series of bestselling books that claim to contain messages that were delivered to the author by Jesus as she listened for him with her pen in hand.
6. Those who fall prey to such teachings are being “taken captive” by empty deceit and human tradition.

IV. A Reminder: You Have Been Filled in Christ

- A. In the remainder of our passage, verses 9-10, Paul sets forth the reason why Christians must not be ensnared by these empty ways of thinking.
 1. The reason why Christians must never look elsewhere for fulfillment or meaning is because everything that we need is found in Jesus Christ.
 2. All the fullness of the deity – the very essence of God – dwells bodily in Jesus.
 3. He does not merely have godlike qualities.
 4. He is God in the flesh.
 5. This is why we do not need any intermediaries.
 6. It is why we do not need to go on a mystical quest to find God.
 7. God has spoken to us in his Son.
 8. And the Word that God has spoken is absolutely sufficient for us.
 9. To deny this is to deny that God is sufficient.
 10. In the words of John Calvin: “when [Paul] says that the fulness of the Godhead dwells in Christ, he means simply, that God is wholly found in him, so that he who is not contented with Christ alone,

desires something better and more excellent than God.”

- B. Because of who Christ is, all of those who believe in him participate in the life that he has in himself.
1. This is what our text means in verse 10 when it says, “and you have been filled in him.”
 2. Paul will develop this idea further in verses 11-15, which we will study next week.
 3. Here he simply says, “you have been filled in [Christ].”
 4. Notice that he doesn’t even specify what it is that we have been filled with.
 5. This is intentional.
 6. By stating it this way, Paul is making the point that in Christ we have everything that we could possibly need.
 7. That is a profound assertion, is it not?
 8. We often have the sense that we are lacking in something.
 9. We lack wisdom; we lack contentment; we lack peace, or joy, or something else.
 10. This text is telling us that Jesus Christ is sufficient for you.
 11. Anyone who is apart from Christ is incomplete, no matter how fulfilled their life may appear.
 12. But if you are in Christ, you are filled.
 13. As the apostle John reminds us at the beginning of his Gospel, “For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” (John 1:16 ESV)