

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Standing Against Satan's Threats: Are You Rooted in Christ?" (Colossians 2:7)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

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## **Introduction**

Let me begin again today by reading for you the passage that we are studying at present, Colossians chapter two, verses six through ten:

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. 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. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

As we have been studying Colossians chapter two, we have seen that there are three main threats to the true church of Jesus Christ, and they are the same threats in all times and in all places. This triple threat to the church consists of worldly philosophies, legalism, and man-made doctrines.

We saw in our last message that this was true in the early church 2,000 years ago, it was true at the time of the Protestant Reformation 500 years ago, and it is also true in the church in our time. These three threats to the church may present themselves in different ways in different times and in different places, but these are the three main things that Satan always uses to try to take individual believers, and to try to take the church as a body, into various kinds of captivity and bondage.

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We focused a great deal, last time, on some of the forms that those threats are taking in our day. We saw some of the kinds of success that Satan, the enemy, is having in the church today.

And we have also seen, here in Colossians chapter two, that the Apostle Paul tells believers that we need to maintain a united battle front against these threats. He uses military terminology, the terminology of warfare. In our day, the church's united battle front against the forces of the enemy has largely broken down. In our day it is not simply a matter of maintaining a united battle front as it was for the church at Colosse. In our time, it is a question of restoring that battle front, because the church is not in battle array against the enemy, it is in disarray, and the enemy is well inside the gates.

### **How to Restore the Battle Front**

And so the question we have been considering is this: How are we to restore that united battle front against Satan's triple threats of worldly philosophy, legalism, and man-made doctrines? And we saw here in Colossians chapter two, verses six to ten, that there are four main things that we need to do, and indeed, we must do. These things are not options, they are imperatives.

First, we must walk an enlightened walk – verse 6: "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." And in a previous message we went into this point in some detail.

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Second, we must grow upon a firm foundation – verse 7: “rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” That is going to be our focus beginning today. And then there are two more points we are going to take up, the Lord willing, in future messages.

Third, we must trust in a complete Savior – verse 9: “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”

And fourth, we must rest in a complete salvation – verse 10: “and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”

And so we are focusing today on this second imperative that we find in Colossians chapter two and verse seven. In order to restore a united battle front against the enemy, we must be "rooted and built up in Him [that is, in Christ] and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving."

### **Six Key Characteristics**

Now at the end of our last message, I mentioned six things that are true about a Christian and about a church that grows upon a firm foundation, the foundation of Christ alone:

1. The believer who is growing on a firm foundation puts down strong roots in sound doctrine, the doctrine of Christ, in order that we may grow upward in Christ.

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2. The believer who is growing on a firm foundation possesses stability in the truth.
3. The believer who is growing on a firm foundation is constantly taking in the nourishment of sound teaching.
4. The believer who is growing on a firm foundation possesses a rootedness and an anchoredness in Christ that are "abundant" – and we are going to see what that means.
5. The believer who is growing on a firm foundation possesses deep gratitude for Christ and for the truth.
6. The believer who is growing on a firm foundation recognizes that being rooted and built up in Christ is a continual, lifetime process.

### **Paul's Two Metaphors**

Now, in order to really understand these things, we need to think deeply and seriously about what Paul is saying in this verse: "rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving." The very first thing we see in verse seven is that the Apostle Paul under divine inspiration uses two metaphors.

First, he speaks of being "rooted". The metaphor, obviously, is that of a tree that is rooted in the ground, rooted in the soil. He says that we as believers must be rooted in Christ.

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And then Paul immediately uses a second metaphor. He says that we as believers must be "built up" in Christ. And here he is using the metaphor of a building that is erected upon a foundation.

Now Paul uses these two metaphors because they have one thing in common: Both a tree and a building have to be firmly rooted and anchored downward, in order to rise upward. And so it is for the believer in Christ, and so it is for the body of believers who constitute the Church of Jesus Christ. We must be firmly rooted and anchored downward, in Christ, in order to rise upward, established in the faith.

Now I want you to take a few moments to think about each of these metaphors, and what they mean, and what they imply.

### **Paul's Tree Metaphor**

First, let's think about the metaphor of the tree – being rooted in Christ. Now I have had this experience, and I'm sure some of you who are listening today have had it as well. Several times I have been involved in projects where we had to cut down large trees, so that a house or a barn or other structure could be built where the trees have stood. And so you go out with chain saws and other equipment and you cut down those large trees.

But when you cut down those trees, and you take them out of the way, your job is only half done. You've taken away the visible part of the tree, but then you have

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to deal with the part that is left in the ground. You then have to dig deep into the ground, in order to dig out and cut away the roots of those big trees. A tree that rises a hundred feet into the air may have roots that reach down into the soil twenty feet or more.

And so to understand Paul's metaphor, we need to remind ourselves of the purposes of the roots of a tree. The roots of the tree go down deep into the soil to tap into the nourishment that the soil provides for the tree to grow, and to keep the tree upright and stable when strong winds blow. And those roots, the part of the tree that isn't visible to the human eye, those roots are constantly sending water and nourishment up into the visible part of the tree that may grow to be a hundred feet tall or more.

That nourishment that the roots gather up and send up into the tree support the life of the tree, and the health of the tree, and the growth of the tree, and the stability of the tree, and the nourishment that the roots send up also supports the production of the fruit or the seed that the tree produces.

### **Paul's Building Metaphor**

And then Paul also uses the metaphor of the foundation of a building. In the Roman Empire of Paul's time, there were huge construction projects in the city of Rome and in various other places in the empire. Massive buildings were erected – palaces, government buildings, temples, amphitheatres, bridges, aqueducts, and so

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on. These huge buildings often took years to construct. The people to whom Paul was writing would have been familiar with such things.

Now, perhaps you have seen a tall office building or skyscraper being built. Perhaps there's one going up right now at a place that you pass on your way to work every day, or on your way to church on Sunday. And so as you go past the building site day after day and week after week, you can see the progress of the construction.

Usually the first thing you'll see is a sign on a vacant piece of land that says, "this building to be built on this site". And there is a picture of this tall and massive building that is going to be erected at that location, an apartment building or an office building or whatever the case may be.

And then as you drive past that location each day or each week you see the construction progress. And in the beginning, for many weeks, and perhaps even months, you see large trucks going back and forth from the building site, and you see huge pieces of construction equipment being brought in – backhoes, and bulldozers, and earthmovers, and great cranes with excavating buckets, and huge dump trucks, and so on. But during those first weeks and months you don't see the tall and massive building on the picture rising into the sky.

And then after a number of weeks or months you see hundreds of large, long steel pilings being brought onto the building site, and for several more weeks you see

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those pilings being driven into the ground by huge pile drivers. But still, during those many more weeks, you don't see the building on the picture rising into the sky.

And then after the pilings are in place and the pile driving equipment is taken away, you see large loads of lumber being brought in, and large steel plates being brought in, and out of those materials large forms are constructed, and concrete trucks bringing in hundreds of tons of concrete, and you see that concrete being poured into those forms. And this part of the process goes on for a number of weeks or perhaps months. And even at this point, you don't see the building on the picture rising into the sky.

But then, at last, after many weeks and months of preparation, the building begins to rise out of the ground. And often it seems that in less time than it took to do all of that preparatory work, the building rises up to its full height, and people begin to occupy it and use it for the purpose for which it was intended.

Why did all that preparation take place before the building rose? The reason is that the foundation of a building must go down to bedrock, and be anchored in that bedrock, in order for a strong and stable and usable edifice to rise high into the sky.

And so it is to be for you as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. You are to be rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ. You are to be anchored in the Lord Jesus Christ. You must grow upon a firm foundation. And so now that we have begun to think

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more deeply and more seriously about the two metaphors that Paul is using here, I want to begin to take you back to the six points that I mentioned earlier.

### **Are You Rooted in Christ?**

So we begin with point number one: The believer who is growing on a firm foundation puts down strong roots in sound doctrine, the doctrine of Christ, in order that we may grow upward in Christ.

Where do we find that doctrine? Only in one place, the Word of God. Second Timothy 3:16 – "All Scripture," Paul declares, "is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine..."

Paul tells Timothy, "...give attention to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine...Meditate on these things, give yourself entirely to them, so that your progress may be evident to all" (1 Timothy 4:13-15).

Titus chapter one, verse nine: Paul tells Titus that an elder, a teacher in the church, must be "holding fast to the faithful Word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."

Second John verses nine and ten: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him." (2 John 9-10)

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And so Paul exhorts the Colossian believers, and he exhorts us today, to be "rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving." Be like the tree that is deeply and firmly rooted in the soil. Be deeply and firmly rooted in the true doctrine of the true Christ. Be like the building that is erected on a firm foundation. Be firmly established on the true doctrine of the true Christ.

The metaphor of the tree that is firmly rooted is not unique in Colossians. We also find it in the Old Testament, and no doubt Paul had in mind the words of the first Psalm when he was writing to the Colossians:

Blessed is the man [the psalmist says] who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

The metaphor of the building that is erected on a sure foundation is not unique with Paul either. It would be no surprise to find that Paul had in mind the words of

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the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew chapter seven, when he was exhorting the Colossians to be built up in Christ. In Matthew seven, our Lord says this:

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall. (Matthew 7:21-27)

Dear friend, be sure that you are building your spiritual life on the right foundation, the only sure foundation, the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in this connection, it is interesting to note something else about the words that Paul uses here in our passage, Colossians chapter two, verse seven. He says that it is imperative for us to be "built up" in Christ. The word that is translated "built

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up” in this verse is a special word. It has to do with building a building on a foundation that has already been laid. Not laying your own foundation, but building on an existing foundation.

Paul declares in First Corinthians 3:11 that “no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” The Corinthian church was trying to build on other foundations – on worldly philosophy, on legalism, on man-made doctrines. Paul calls them back to the true foundation. There is only one foundation, Jesus Christ. You must build on that foundation, just as I am building on that foundation.

One of the great hymns of the faith, a hymn that isn't sung very often in the postmodern Evangelical church, echoes this great fact. The hymn writer says this:

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.  
  
His oath, His covenant, His blood  
Support me in the whelming flood;  
When all around my soul gives way,  
He then is all my hope and stay.  
  
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand.

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Dear friend, this is the only way you can stand firm in the battle against Satan's triple threats of worldly philosophy, legalism, and man-made doctrines – "rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving."

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