

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Rooted in Christ: Abounding in the True Faith" (Colossians 2:7)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/6/2011

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Introduction

In our study of Colossians chapter two, at the present time we are considering a question that is vital for the individual Christian in our time, and for the church as a body of believers in our time. The question has to do with the great challenge that we face today. The challenge is this: It is essential for the Evangelical church to restore a solid battle front against Satan's efforts to undermine and destroy the church.

That battle front has disintegrated in most churches today. The enemy has rushed in like a flood. Satan is having great success in his efforts to undermine and destroy the faith of individual Christians, and to undermine and destroy entire churches. What Satan is doing involves three kinds or categories of threats – a triple threat to the church – consisting of worldly philosophy, legalism, and man-made doctrines. These three things are completely foreign to the system of doctrine that we find in the Word of God. Completely foreign to the true Christian faith. But these three things now have many Christians in bondage, and many churches in bondage.

And so, the question we are addressing in these messages is this: How are we to restore and maintain a solid battle front against these threats? How is it to be done? We must not look to ourselves for the answer. We must look to the Word of God. As we begin today I want to read for you once again the passage where we find the answer to this question, in Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse five. The Apostle Paul writes these vital words:

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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. 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.

Now I have pointed out that in the original language of the New Testament Paul uses military terms here. He speaks of "good order and steadfastness." This is military terminology in the Greek. "Good order." "Steadfastness." Take your battle positions. Stay in your ranks. Put up and keep up a united battle front against the enemy, and against these three things in particular – worldly philosophy, legalism, and man-made doctrines.

We must separate ourselves from those who promote these things and refuse to repent. We must put these devices of the enemy out of the church. We must put the enemy's thinking out of our minds as individual Christians. There is no alternative but defeat. We must re-establish the strong battle front, because the enemy will keep coming back in various ways, and often in very subtle ways. We must be ready. We must be prepared.

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That is the situation today. That is what we must do. And here Paul tells us how to do it. And we have seen that this involves four imperatives that we find in the passage that I just read for you:

First, we must walk an enlightened walk – verse 6: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.”

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.”

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.”

Now at the moment we are focusing on the second point: We must grow upon a firm foundation. Thus far we have seen three important things:

First, we saw that the believer who is growing on a firm foundation puts down strong roots in sound doctrine. We saw that Paul uses two metaphors in this verse, two word-pictures: that of a tree putting down strong roots, and that of a building being erected upon a firm foundation.

Secondly, we saw that the believer who is growing on a firm foundation possesses stability in the truth. When the winds of apostasy blow through the

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church, the believer who has put down strong roots in Christ and in His Word will stand firm. Such a person will not be bent over or brought crashing down by any wind of false doctrine.

Thirdly, we saw that the believer who is growing on a firm foundation is constantly taking in the nourishment of sound doctrine. "Rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith, as you have been taught," Paul says. We saw that, in the original language of the New Testament, the word that is translated "sound" doctrine in various places actually signifies "healthy" doctrine. The kind of doctrine that will nourish the believer and the church, just as a tree needs to be fed and nourished in order to stand strong, and just as an army needs to be fed and nourished in order to be prepared for battle. There is only one source of spiritually health-giving nourishment, one source of sound doctrine, and that is the Word of God. Likewise, there is only one test of sound doctrine, and that is whether or not the teaching that you hear or read conforms to Holy Scripture.

Today, we come to a fourth point concerning this imperative of being rooted and grounded in Christ. To introduce this point, let me remind you of the words of verse seven of Colossians chapter two once again: "rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving."

Today I want to focus our attention on that word "abounding". And so, our fourth point is this: The believer who is growing on a firm foundation possesses a

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rootedness in Christ, a firmly anchored position in sound doctrine, that is *abundant*. You are to be “abounding in it” Paul says.

Now in order to understand what this means, and why it is so important as we consider this vital necessity of erecting and maintaining a solid battle front against Satan’s triple threat to the church, we need to ask and answer three questions:

1. What does it mean to “abound”?
2. What is it that we are to abound in?
3. How does this abounding or abundance relate to this question of putting up and keeping up a solid battle front against the enemy?

What Does It Mean To “Abound”?

So we begin with the first question. What does it mean to “abound”? The word that is translated “abound” in this verse is a very interesting one. We find various forms of it over forty times in the New Testament.

In the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ miraculous feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand, this is the word that is used to describe the excess food that was left over, after all the people had eaten their fill and had been satisfied. There was this great abundance. There was far more than was needed.

And then in Romans chapter five, Paul says that “the grace of God, and the gift of grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, has abounded unto many.” Paul is

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setting up a contrast. He points out that the sin of one man, Adam, has resulted in widespread and ongoing misery and destruction for the human race and for the creation as a whole. But, he says, the obedience of one man, the God-man Jesus Christ, has accomplished a far greater deliverance and blessing for the saints and for the entire created order.

Again, the idea is that God's provision is far above and beyond what is needed. God's deliverance by grace is so great, so abundant, that it simply overwhelms and sweeps away that which is, from a human standpoint, an insurmountable problem. Human beings who are dead in trespasses and sins, absolutely without hope, under bondage, bound for Hell, but now completely, gloriously delivered into freedom from sin, into eternal life, into the promise of a new world to come. God in Christ has done not only that which is enough to redeem one man but to redeem untold millions – and yet beyond that, it is enough to redeem the entire created order from sin and to restore all things to perfection forever and ever. This is truly an abounding, abundant redemption.

That is the kind of a term we are dealing with here in Colossians chapter two, when Paul speaks to us about this matter of erecting and maintaining a solid battle front against the threats of Satan.

What Is It That We Are to Abound *In*?

Note how Paul puts it here in Colossians two, verse seven: "rooted and built up in Him" – that is, in Christ – "and established in the faith, as you have been taught,

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abounding in it with thanksgiving." "Abounding in it." This brings us to our second question. Abounding in what? What is it that we are to abound in? Paul is speaking here of abounding in the faith. "Abounding in it." Abounding in the true faith. Abounding in faith in the true Christ, the One whom I have set before you, Paul says.

Abounding in faith in the Christ who is the very image of the invisible God. Abounding in faith in the Christ who exists from all eternity. Abounding in faith in the Christ by whom all things were made, for whom all things were made, and by whom the entire universe is presently sustained.

Abounding in faith in the Christ who has redeemed us by His blood. Abounding in faith in the Christ into whose kingdom we have been conveyed – out of darkness, and into light. Abounding in faith in the Christ who is the firstborn from among the dead. Abounding in faith in the Christ who will present you before the Father holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.

Abounding in faith in the Christ in whom all the fullness dwells, all the fullness of the Godhead in a body. Abounding in faith in the Christ who is the Head of all principality and power. Abounding in faith in the Christ in whom you are absolutely complete for eternity.

This is *the faith* in which you are to abound. Faith always has an object. And the only object of genuine Christian faith is Jesus Christ Himself. "Abounding in it" – abounding in this faith, in this Christ, Paul says. Not a faith in a Christ invented by man, but *the faith* in *the* genuine Christ of the Bible.

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It is noteworthy that this term “abounding” is a favorite term of the Apostle Paul. It is part of his writing style, if you will, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I mentioned that the word “abounding” is used over forty times in the New Testament, and we find that nearly three fourths of those uses of the word are in Paul’s epistles. Paul often uses this term as he speaks of the life and the thinking of the individual believer, and the life and the thinking of the church as a body. He speaks over and over again of the fact that the life and the thinking of the believer and the church should have this keynote of abounding in Christ, abounding in the truth, abounding in the faith. Let me give you some examples.

As Paul writes to the Philippian church to instruct them in their new life in Christ, he says this: “And this I pray, that your love may *abound* still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:9-11)

At the end of his first epistle to the Thessalonian church, Paul writes this: “Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should *abound* more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 4:1-2)

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As Paul ends his discourse on the second coming of Christ in First Corinthians chapter fifteen, he writes this: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always *abounding* in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58)

As Paul closes his great epistle to the Romans, he writes this: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may *abound* in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

"Joy and peace in believing." Literally, in the original, it is "joy and peace in *the* believing." The word "believing" is the verb form of the same word that we have as a noun in Colossians chapter two, verse seven. In Romans it is "*the* believing." In Colossians it is "*the* faith." We are to abound in "*the* faith." The believer who is growing on a firm foundation possesses a rootedness in Christ, a firmly anchored position in sound doctrine, the doctrine of Christ, that is an *abundant* position.

Now this may seem like a strange way of speaking of these things. But the issue becomes clear as we move on to our third question. We have seen, first of all, *what* it means to abound. We have seen, secondly, what it is that we are to abound *in*.

How Does Abounding Relate to the Church's Battle Front?

So we now come to our third question: *How* does this abounding or abundance relate to this matter of putting up and keeping up a solid battle front against the enemy? And the answer is simply this: If you as an individual believer are

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abounding in the true faith in the true Christ, there will not be room for anything else. If the church as a body of believers is abounding in the true faith in the true Christ, there will not be room for anything else in the life and thinking and ministry of the church. Satan will not be able to gain a foothold for his falsehoods, because of the church's abounding faith in the genuine Christ, because of the church's abounding rootedness in sound doctrine.

This is the problem in the church today. What we have in the church today is a woeful neglect of sound doctrine. What we have in the church today is a tragic neglect of the preaching and teaching of the truth as it is found only in Jesus Christ and in His written Word.

What happens when the church neglects these things? What happens when the church neglects the Bible? What happens when the church neglects the true Christ? The result is that the church creates a spiritual vacuum. And what is true in physics is also true in the church: Nature abhors a vacuum. The natural world will do everything it can to fill a physical vacuum. And in the spiritual realm, Satan will do everything he can to fill a spiritual vacuum in the church.

And how does Satan fill that vacuum? He fills it with worldly philosophy, with legalism, and with man-made doctrines. The secular mindset fills that vacuum. Man, not God, becomes the source of authority. As a result, man's word, not God's Word, shapes the church's thinking and conduct. Here is the simple fact: If the

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church doesn't teach the Word of God, it teaches the thinking of the world. There is no third alternative.

We hear much today about the "purpose-driven church." Today's postmodern Evangelical church is largely driven by purposes that have little or nothing to do with God's Word. The spiritual vacuum created by neglecting Bible doctrine is being filled by worldly philosophies, man-centered authority structures, and the utterly foolish idea that we can define the truth by consensus.

There is no spiritual power in these things. The church loses its spiritual power when it unplugs itself from the Source of that power, the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. *Those* things are the means by which the Spirit of God brings men to Christ, and causes them to become rooted and grounded and growing upward in Christ.

What must the church do in order to regain its lost spiritual power? The answer is this: Christ's church must once again become the Scripture-driven church. The Bible must be its sole source of doctrine. The Bible alone must be its infallible critic in all things. And Christ must be the undisputed Head of the church.

The Apostle Paul says one thing further about this matter of abounding in the true faith. At the end of verse seven he says that it is to be "with thanksgiving." "Abounding in it with thanksgiving." That keynote of thanksgiving, that keynote of gratitude for the true Christ, gratitude for the true faith in Christ, is missing in much of the Evangelical world today. That is a major part of the reason why Satan has gained the advantage in

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so many churches today. Satan takes advantage of a lack of thanksgiving, a lack of gratitude, a lack of appreciation, for the true faith in the true Christ.

This is another aspect of the spiritual vacuum that we find in so much of the postmodern Evangelical world. We need to restore the vital element of thanksgiving, of gratitude, of deep appreciation for the true faith – and this can only be present in the life of the church when there is a growing and deepening understanding of the true faith. And so this issue of abounding in the true faith *with thanksgiving* will be the focus of our next message, the Lord willing.

About the Broadcast

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