

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Built Up in Christ: A Message to Hearers & Learners" (Colossians 2:7)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 4/3/2011

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## **“As You Have Been Taught”**

As we begin today I want to draw your attention once again to the passage with which we are dealing at the present time, Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse four. The Apostle Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives this exhortation to the church:

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, we have seen that in Colossians chapter two the Apostle Paul is telling us that we need to put up, and keep up, a solid battle front against Satan's triple threat to the church. And that triple threat consists of worldly philosophy, legalism, and man-made doctrines. Satan is always at work, always trying to bring these things into the church. Satan is always trying to get the church to move away from its God-given message, to forsake its God-given mission. And in our time, the Devil is having a great deal of

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success in doing that. That is why this particular study is so vital for us. We need to erect and maintain a solid battle front against these threats, in our lives and thinking as individuals, and in the life and the thinking and the message of the church.

And so Paul is telling us how to do it. At the present time we are focusing in particular on what he tells us in verse seven: "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." In other words, you as a Christian, and the church as a body, need to grow upon a firm foundation.

Now, in our last message, we began to focus on the fact that growing upon a firm foundation depends upon continual sound teaching. We noticed how Paul puts it: "...rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, *as you have been taught...*"

Now, this brings us face to face with a problem that we find in much of the Evangelical church today. We've talked about this in previous messages. There is very little real teaching. There is very little real instruction in sound doctrine. In our time there is a famine of systematic, expository preaching of the whole counsel of God as it is found only in the Word of God.

We see this reflected in the lives of many people who profess to be Evangelical Christians. We see it in the ministry and the message of many churches that are substituting other things for the faithful preaching of the Word of God. The solid battle front of which Paul speaks in Colossians chapter two has broken down. And so Satan is making great headway in many churches. He is having great success in leading

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many churches away from the truth. They are accepting and promoting counterfeits that are based upon the three things that Paul warns against in Colossians chapter two – worldly philosophy, legalism, and man-made doctrines.

Paul says that if we are to put up that solid battle front once again, a solid battle front against Satan's triple threat to the church, and if we are going to keep that solid battle front in place, then we must have sound preaching and teaching by faithful men. We must have it. There is no substitute for it. And so I said in our last message that we were going to approach this great need from two standpoints: first, that of the preacher or teacher, and secondly, that of the hearers or learners.

And so in our last message we approached this great need from the standpoint of the preacher or teacher. We spent much of our time looking at a number of passages where God makes it absolutely clear exactly what He requires of preachers and teachers, if they are to be faithful preachers and teachers of the truth, if they are going to be faithful watchmen against the enemy, guarding the people of God against Satan's errors. So we looked at this great need from that standpoint last time.

Today I am going to take up this same issue from the standpoint of those who are to be taught – the hearers, the learners, the people of the church. We have seen that the preacher or teacher has a great and a grave responsibility to teach the truth without compromise, "warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom," as Paul says in Colossians 1:28. But the hearer, the learner, also has a great and a grave

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responsibility in these things. And that is what I want to focus our attention upon today.

### **A Command, Not an Option**

Let me begin by saying this: Being “rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith” is a command, not an option. The words that Paul uses in Colossians chapter two are imperative words. This is vital, Paul says. This is indispensable. This is something you cannot neglect. If you do neglect it, the consequences will be devastating.

Second Peter chapter three, verse seventeen tells us the same thing: “...beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but [rather] grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:17-18). Growth is essential. Forward movement, upward movement, is essential. You cannot afford to stand still. You cannot afford to become complacent. You cannot ever think that you have heard enough or learned enough. You cannot afford to fall into the trap of thinking that there is no more truth that you need to lay hold of. You cannot afford to fall into the trap of thinking that you do not need to be constantly reminded of the truth you already know, and reinforced in it, so that you will retain your grasp of that truth.

God wants you to sit under sound preaching and teaching. God wants you to take it in. And God wants you to exercise Biblical discernment as you hear it. We have already seen those things.

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And, God not only wants you to do these things in the setting of a church service. God also wants you to study the Bible for yourself, by yourself. God wants you to study His Word as a family. God wants you to study His Word every day. And whether it is in the church or in the home or in some other setting, God wants you always to study His Word with the same kind of discernment, and with the same kind of a heart that seeks instruction, a heart that seeks the truth, a heart that is open to the truth, a heart that seeks to apply the truth to your life, a heart that seeks to guard your soul against error by being rooted and built up in the truth. Being "rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith" is a command, not an option.

### **A Lifelong Process**

Secondly, being "rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith" is a lifelong process. You can never stop.

When you become a Christian you haven't finished. You haven't arrived. You have just begun. That is what Paul means in Philippians chapter one when he says, "He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." You are now a saint of God. Your salvation is secure. But when God regenerates you and you repent of your sins and receive Christ, God has only begun the good work that He is going to do in you. "This is the will of God," Paul says in First Thessalonians 4:3, "even your sanctification." That is going to be a lifelong process. It is never complete in this life. No matter how long you have been a Christian, no matter how long you may yet live, no matter how much you may grow and mature in Christ, there is still

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more ground to be gained, there are still more things that you need to be prepared and equipped to face in the Christian life.

This is what Paul is saying to the Colossians. In chapter one, he tells them, you have this *standing* in Christ. You have this great salvation. But now, there must be this *growing* in Christ – chapter one, beginning at verse nine: "...filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and [continually] increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power..."

This is a life-long process with an end-of-life goal. Paul tells us what that goal is in chapter one, verse twenty-eight: "that we may present every man [before the throne of God] perfect [or complete] in Christ Jesus." That is the goal of the preacher and teacher, and it must be the goal of the hearer and the learner as well.

And let me say one other thing. This is also a life-long process for the preacher or teacher. The faithful preacher or teacher of the Word of God must realize at all times that he, too, must be continually "increasing in the knowledge of God" – "growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." The preacher or teacher cannot stand still either.

Being "rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith" is, first of all, a command, not an option. And, secondly, it is a lifelong process.

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## **The Christian’s Only Safe Course**

And thirdly, being “rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith” is the only safe thing for you to do. It is the only safe course for you to take as a Christian.

And let me emphasize that positive point by stating it in the negative: *Not* being “rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith” – *not* obeying this imperative, *not* engaging in this lifelong process – that is the most dangerous thing that you can possibly do.

We find so many statements of this in the Scriptures. Let me mention just a few. I already mentioned the warning we find in Second Peter chapter three: “...beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but [rather] grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:17-18).

Jesus Himself told His disciples in Mark chapter thirteen, “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name...and will deceive many” (Mark 13:5-6).

Paul put it this way to the church at Corinth at the beginning of Second Corinthians chapter eleven: “I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent [the Devil] deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a

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different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted — [I fear that] you may well put up with it!" (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

And the writer to the Hebrews, after he gives his great exposition of the person and work of Jesus Christ in chapter one, says this at the beginning of chapter two of his epistle: "Therefore" – because all of these things are true of Christ our Savior – "we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard," – notice – "lest at any time we should let them slip."

What do these passages speak of? They speak of the fact that you need to press on in this process of lifelong instruction in sound doctrine, because there is the constant danger that these things will slip out of your grasp. You will lose your steadfastness. You will be deceived. You will be led away into error.

Why does the Bible emphasize this so much? It is for a very practical reason. There can be an awful tendency in the Christian life to think that somehow you are immune to the Devil's traps. You say to yourself, "Oh, look how that happened to somebody else. But it can't happen to me." Dear friend, let me tell you that such an attitude strikes terror in my heart whenever I hear it. I have seen Christian people, and even entire churches, led away into horrible error, horrible sin, as the result of that kind of thinking. "It can't happen to me." "It can't happen in our church." Dear friend, that kind of thinking is just the kind of opening the Devil is waiting for. And the Devil will take every advantage of it.

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How will he do it? Satan will use that opening to plant the seeds of doubt and confusion in your heart. And so what does the Word of God tell us to do? Proverbs chapter four, verse twenty-three: "Keep your heart" – guard your heart – "with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life... Let your eyes look straight ahead... Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil" (Proverbs 4:23-27).

You see, this relates back to something we looked at in a previous message on Colossians chapter two, verse seven, and that is the imperative of thankfulness, of gratitude, for Christ and for the truth. That needs to be the keynote of our attitude, because that kind of thankfulness and gratitude involves humility. It involves a recognition of our dependence upon God to continually deliver us from the evil one. It involves a recognition of the fact that we need to be conscious of our deficiencies. We need to be conscious of our weakness, our vulnerability, apart from Christ and His Word and His Spirit.

Let me put it a different way. To say that you lack nothing is the sin of the church at Laodicea in Revelation chapter three: What does Jesus say to that church? He says, "You say...I have need of nothing – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." And what is the answer? Jesus tells them: "I counsel you to buy gold from Me refined in the fire... Be zealous and repent."

We must remember that we are in a life-long spiritual battle. There is no letup in that battle. "Put on the whole armor of God," Paul says, Ephesians chapter six, "that

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you may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil.” The idea in the original language is, “put on the whole armor of God *and never take it off.*” You must use it continually. You must become ever more proficient in using it. And the weapon that is in your hands as part of that armor is “the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.”

And so we as believers have this command from God, every one of us, to engage in this lifelong process of “being rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith” so that we may be able to put up and keep up a solid battle front against Satan’s triple threats to the church. It is the only safe thing for you to do. And it is the most dangerous thing for you to neglect.

### **“I Press On”**

Even the great Apostle Paul himself had this attitude. In Philippians chapter three he tells us that this is his constant striving: “That I may know Him” – that I may know Christ. “Not that I have already attained,” he says, “not that I am already perfected, but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.” I thank God for what I have, he says, but I want more. I need more. I can never stand still. I can never regress. “I press on” – “This one thing I do.”

You cannot sit back and relax. You must press on in this lifelong quest to be more and more “rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith.” Those who are preachers and teachers have a responsibility to faithfully communicate the truth. And those who hear, those who learn, have a responsibility to take it in, and to digest it, and to grow by it. God uses means to do this. It doesn’t happen by osmosis. God uses His

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Word. God uses preaching and teaching. God uses your personal Bible study. God uses *you* to listen, and to learn, and to take it in, and to use your mind, and to be renewed – literally renovated – in your mind (Romans 12:1-2).

Now dear friend, you may be hearing this and thinking, "God is asking too much of me." If you're thinking that way, you're absolutely wrong. But perhaps you are also saying, "But I am not equal to this task." And if you are thinking that way, you are absolutely right. None of us are equal to the task. You cannot do it on your own. You need the Holy Spirit of God to illuminate His Word for you. You have the Author of the Word of God living within you. Ask Him to help you and to guide you. Ask, and you shall receive. God has asked so little of you in comparison to what He has done for you. And God will provide every resource you need, to do anything and everything He calls upon you to do.

We read in the Old Testament that God commanded that every king of Israel was to write out his own personal copy of the Scriptures. Why was he to do this? We read the reason in Deuteronomy chapter seventeen. God said,

And it shall be with him [with the king], and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel. (Deuteronomy 17:19-20)

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If God commanded the Old Testament kings to do that, how can we New Testament Christians – how can we who are going to rule and reign with Christ forever – how can we do anything less than diligently study God's Word, make it our lifetime study?

The fact is, you can do no less. This, dear friends, is God's message to learners and to hearers in the church. When you become a Christian you haven't finished, you've just begun. You need to put up, and keep up, a solid battle front against Satan's threats to your spiritual life, and to the spiritual life and the Gospel message of the church. There is great safety, and great reward, both for this life and for the life to come, in "being rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith."

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