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Captivated by Christ

Colossians 2:6-10

The secret to maximum Christian flourishing is simply to be captivated by Christ.

LTS: John 17

Introduction:

How God thinks about you is the most important thing about you. And the thoughts you conceive about God are the most important and influential thoughts you will ever have.

In the middle of John 17 (Jesus' High-priestly prayer) Jesus asks the Father (21) "that they (i.e. his followers) "may be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us..." Five verses later, then, he prays, "I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them."

Behold the foundations of what is arguably the most precious and magnificent doctrine in God's revelation to man; namely, that by the sacrificial death of the Son of God we NOT only received forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life, but the way God thinks of us is radically and eternally altered.

Instead of viewing us as the just objects of his righteous wrath he now thinks of us as united with or existing in Christ. And that is of supreme importance because the way God thinks about you determines how he relates to you. And since God now thinks of you as united to Christ, the Love that the Father has always had for his Son is now the love that he has for you. That is to say, if you are in Christ, my friend, God loves you with the same love with which He loves Jesus.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is this: that God created man for his glory and our great joy, but man, of his own accord, rejected God's promises and scoffed at his warning. He did the one thing God had forbidden him to do, thereby breaking fellowship with God and earning the grim and inescapable prospect of judgment.

God, however, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, humbled himself and became a man. As a man he fulfilled all of God's righteous requirement and bore AND bore the penalty for our unrighteousness (our sins) in His body on the cross.

Now, the free offer of grace is extended to all. Those who repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are saved to the uttermost and brought into such a relationship with God that the apostle Paul loves to describe as "in Christ."

Apparently, a number of men and women in the ancient city of Colossae listened to this message when Epaphras (a disciple of Paul) preached it. And many repented from the heart and

were born again. Or as Paul describes it (1:13) God “delivered them from the domain of darkness and transferred them to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Paul hints that he had not had the privilege of meeting these dear people face to face, but he loved them already. And he was concerned for them. You see, there were false teachers roaming the land who were proclaiming a gospel that sounded so similar to the true gospel of Jesus that it was tricking people. Professing believers were giving up on the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ in favor of an approach to relating to God that was harder, more complicated and yet somehow seemed more religious, at least as far as men conceive of religion.

Theirs was a religion that tipped its hat to Christ, and seemed to honor Jesus for his sacrifice, but which also required – in addition to Christ -

- abstinence from certain foods,
- attendance at certain feasts and sabbath days, and
- severe treatment of the body.

It all seemed so plausible, so logical! After all, that’s how all the other religions of the world approach their gods. But Paul knew that the tantalizing invitation that was being offered to the saints in Colossae came from the mouth of the same serpent that deceived Eve in the Garden. Notice how Paul describes it in 2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits or the world, and not according to... Christ.

I suspect that every Christian hearing my voice today would have to confess that there have been occasions when your walk with the Lord could be described as anything but flourishing. You know what I mean. I’m talking about the times you found yourself reading the word of God merely to check the box, so you won’t be embarrassed if asked. Or times when you have lost the joy of prayer or the thrill of ministry. Perhaps the Lord’s Table became but a hollow ritual, or the prospect of sharing the gospel felt like a legalistic duty.

In times like these one may be tempted to look over the fence of the religion next door to see how they attempt to engage with God. Perhaps we can learn from them, we think! Maybe they’re doing something that could spice up our experience with God? Paul is warning us against just that kind of thinking.

This morning Paul is saying that whether you are a brand-new Christian, or have been walking with the Lord for a lifetime, the message is this: No matter how young or old in the Lord you may be, the secret to maximum Christian flourishing is simply to be captivated by Christ. In other words, experiencing the fullest, most fruitful relationship with God your whole life long means simply to

- set your mind on Christ,
- your heart on Christ,
- your affections on Christ,
- Your faith on Christ,
- and all of your hope on Christ.
- It means to be captivated by Christ – his deity, his mortality, his humility, his humanity, his authority, his sovereignty, his tenderness, his justice, his patience, his joy, his love, his forgiveness, his righteousness, his grace... just to mention a few of his attributes and infinite perfections.

To experience the fullness of Christian flourishing, we need look nowhere but to Christ, for “He is all and in all.” Paul wants us to experience “Abundant Life in Christ.” His letter comes back to this theme again and again. But where do we begin to get a grasp on what it means to truly flourish as a child of God? What are the basics of Christian flourishing?

Paul’s approach in this part of Colossians can be broken into three brief sections. In the passage before us we find...

I. A Doctrine to embrace

II. A Duty to Fulfill

III. A Danger to avoid.

But before we look at the details, let’s stand and read this passage together. (And isn’t it a marvelous thing to finally be able to read the Scriptures together after so many weeks apart!)

Read Col. 2:6-10

The first thing we should acknowledge is that there is...

I. A Doctrine to Embrace:

1. We’re not going to spend a lot of time on this point because I have already mentioned the doctrine of Union with Christ. Chapters 1 & 2 are full of Union grammar and vocabulary. What is Union with Christ? It is, “*Sharing in the life of Jesus Christ by faith, which allows us to share in all the benefits and riches that result from his Person and work.*”¹

¹ Martin H. Manser, [*Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*](#) (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

2. We will be rightly situated to understand the verses before us, however, if we observe the fact that Paul has made it through 34 verse without issuing a single command. That is both remarkable and very intentional.

3. In most of Paul's letters we see that he tends to go out of his way to establish doctrinal truth before he exhorts with practical instruction.

4. In the case of Colossians, Paul invests much of the first chapter in proclaiming the doctrine of the preeminence of Christ.

- A. Verses 15-20 in particular focus on the glory of Jesus as divine Creator, sustainer, and reconciler of all things.
- B. He talks about how the Father rescued us from darkness and brought us into the light of Jesus.
- C. He reveals that - despite the fact that we used to relate to God with hostility - Christ now is preparing us to stand before the Father holy, blameless, and beyond reproach.
- D. And if that weren't enough, Paul reveals the sacred mystery hidden for past ages and generations; namely – Christ in you, the hope of glory. Union with Christ, the promise of Heaven!

5. All of these truths are divine indicatives upon which Paul will establish his practical imperatives. And we need to understand that the indicatives MUST come first because Knowing Christ always precedes Living for Christ. And it is BY growing in the knowledge of Christ that we fan the flame of devotion to Christ. Paul always Reveals Christ before Calling us to follow Christ. But he does call us to follow Christ in verse six. And that brings us to the second point:

II. A Duty to Fulfill

Read v. 6-7

1. Here Paul very clearly ties together towering theology to practical living. He's saying, People who are saved by union with Christ ought to live in union with Christ. A new lifestyle is befitting people of new standing in the eyes of God. So, Paul says, "As you have received Christ... so walk in Him. How did we receive Christ? By faith. Therefore, we must walk in Him (or live for Him) by faith.

2. What does it mean to "walk (or Live) In Him? Notice the four participles:

- A. "Rooted [in him]."
- B. "Built up [in him]"
- C. Established (or strengthened)
- D. Abounding

3. It will repay us to exercise a little patience with the grammar here.

4. The word “Rooted” is Perfect Passive. It refers to something that happened to us in the past which has abiding results.

- A. What happened to us in the past? Paul says, “you received Christ Jesus the Lord.” God uprooted you from the domain of darkness and planted (rooted) you in the Kingdom of His Son.
- B. This is where your walk in Christ began.

5. The next two participles are “Built up,” and “established” Both terms are in the Present tense. So, the term “built up” implies that we are continually growing, and the term “established” indicates we are increasing in strength. And notice that the object of these prepositions is the faith.

- A. “The faith” in Paul’s writings refers to either the gospel specifically or all of Christian doctrine in general. This is confirmed by the words “Just as you were taught.” In other words, “The faith” is something that the Colossians had been taught. It is propositional truth and doctrine as revealed in the word of God.
- B. So, to “Walk in Christ” means I am actively and continually growing deeper and stronger in my understanding of and obedience to the truths revealed in the word of God – especially the truths about Jesus.
- C. But we should also notice that these words are in the passive voice, which tells us that this work of sanctification – this work of growing in spiritual maturity and strength is a dependent work. Yes, I am actively engaged in the walking, but progress in my walk is dependent upon the sovereign working of the Holy Spirit in my life. I can pray, and I can share the gospel, and I can go to seminary and I can strive to grow deeper in the things of God, but I must always remember that God gives the growth.

6. Do you realize that you can read your Bible all day long and NOT grow in Christ at all? It happens all the time! Without the powerful influence of the indwelling H.S. you may be able to learn the words of the Bible, but they will have NO effect upon your heart. You need the H.S. to do His part before you can ever respond appropriately to any portion Scripture. In 1 Cor. 12:3 Paul goes so far as to say, “No one can even say ‘Jesus is Lord’ apart from the H.S!” We are dependent upon Him for all spiritual growth.

7. And God is committed to making you grow. Paul is telling us that the gospel is for Sanctification NOT merely salvation. Walking in Christ is a continuous hike to higher elevations of spiritual maturity until we are fully conformed to the likeness of Christ. Implicit in Paul’s word here is the fact that if you are alive in Christ, if you have the Spirit of Christ, you will be growing. As we say in discipleship all the time, “God doesn’t expect you to be perfect, but he expects you to be growing.

8. You see, our pursuit of growth is a dependent pursuit. Practically speaking, that means whenever I take up the bible to read, I should pray something like this, “Father. I am about to read your word right now because I want to grow in my knowledge and love Christ. But I know I cannot truly grow unless you grant the growth by your Spirit. As a branch is dependent upon the vine, I confess that my soul is dependent upon you for growth and strength. I am willing to Walk in Christ, but I realize I must walk In Him by faith.

9. Now we come to the last participle (7), “Abounding.” This important term is NOT a passive but a present active, which tells us that the action is taking place continuously and I am responsible to do it! The word Abounding here was a term used to speak of a river that was overflowing its banks.

10. What is God calling us to do in an “Abounding” manner? Are you ready? (7) “Giving Thanks.”

11. Think of it like this: God in his grace plants us In Christ, and gives us the capacity to grow in spiritual maturity and strength, and in response, the river of our thankfulness overflows its banks as we offer it joyfully back to him. God pours out grace upon grace, and in return we offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving back to him.

12. Beloved, this is NOT an insignificant point in Colossians. Let me show you.

- A. (1:3) We always thank God,
- B. (1:12) “giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.
- C. (3:15) Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, And be thankful.
- D. (3:17) And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
- E. (4:2) Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

13. Perhaps the reason we sometimes fail to really flourish in our walk in Christ is because we don’t actively allow the river of our thankfulness to overflow its banks back to God! In the mind of Paul, thankfulness is an essential part of spiritual flourishing. It is a dominant characteristic of one who is captivated by Christ. So much so, in fact, that a failure to offer heart-felt thanksgiving to God make us vulnerable to false teaching. Probably because it short-circuits our joy in God.

14. If you are not flourishing in Christ today, ask yourself, have I been actively offering grateful prayers of thanksgiving to God for all his mercies toward me? Am I abounding in thanksgiving? Paul wants us to be thankful mostly for Christ himself. In fact, He wants us to be captivated by Christ!

15. Paul wants the believers in Colossae to flourish spiritually in their walk with Christ. He wants them to be continually growing and becoming stronger in the faith they had been taught and overflowing with Thanksgiving. This is the duty we are called to fulfill. The duty of dependently pursuing spiritual growth and strength with a heart overflowing with thanksgiving to God.

16. So, Paul's approach to teaching us how to flourish in Christ starts with a *Doctrine to Embrace* and moves to *A Duty to fulfill*. Finally, he warns us of...

III. A Danger to Avoid

Read v. 8

1. When you're not flourishing in your walk with Christ the philosophies and traditions of false religions can begin exerting their gravitational pull on your heart. For example, over the years I have known several men who were raised in good Christian homes but who became disillusioned in their faith. In their failure to flourish in Jesus, they looked over the fence at the neighboring religion and found that, sure enough, they acknowledge Christ in similar ways. But in addition to Christ they also offered other things that seemed so helpful. For example, they offer:

- A. Praying to saints
 - B. Mary as an intercessor
 - C. The practice of the Mass wherein Jesus is re-sacrificed every day
 - D. The doctrine of indulgences by which souls in purgatory can obtain a reduced sentence.
 - E. The rosary
 - F. The rite of penance, confirmation holy orders, last rites, and other so-called spiritual benefits.
 - G. I've walked through the subterranean catacombs of the Russian Orthodox church and watched as people bowed and kissed the glass caskets of dead saints earnestly believing that God would grant them a special blessing for doing so.
2. But my friends, NONE of the philosophies or traditions that undergird such religious systems come from the apostles and none are according to Christ.
3. No wonder Paul calls such practices (8) "Philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the elemental Spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.
4. You don't need any of those things to flourish and grow in Christ. To the contrary, these things serve only to deceive and rob you of what God has promised you exclusively in Christ. Paul wants your heart to be ravished by Christ, constrained by Christ, captivated by Christ. Knowing him is the secret to Christian flourishing.
5. How can it be that Jesus Christ is singularly sufficient to provide ALL that we need? Well, it's because (9) "In Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in Him."
6. You see, beloved, if you are In Christ, you already have everything you need. And Christian growth is largely just about getting to know what you have been given; namely, Christ himself.

7. Paul expresses dominating desire when he writes that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

8. You want to know what enabled Paul to live such a fruitful, joyful and productive life? He had a singular focus. He was captivated by Christ (Phil. 3:10-11)

9. What Paul wanted for himself was a deeper knowledge of Christ. You want to know what he wants for you? Listen to how he prayed for us...

I bow my knees before the Father... that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:14–19)

10. The story is told of Charles Spurgeon, who was riding home one evening after a heavy day's work, feeling weary and depressed, when the verse came to mind, "My grace is sufficient for you." In his mind he immediately compared himself to a little fish in the Thames River, apprehensive lest drinking so many pints of water in the river each day he might drink the Thames dry. Then Father Thames says to him, "Drink away, little fish. My stream is sufficient for you. Next, he thought of a little mouse in the granaries of Egypt, afraid lest its daily nibbles exhaust the supplies and cause it to starve to death. Then Joseph comes along and says. "Cheer up, little mouse. My granaries are sufficient for you." Then he thought of a man climbing some high mountain to reach its lofty summit and dreading lest his breathing might exhaust all the oxygen in the atmosphere. The Creator booms His voice out of heaven, saying, "Breathe away, oh man, and fill your lungs. My atmosphere is sufficient for you!"

11. So it is if you are in Christ. You have him and that is enough. He is abundantly sufficient for you.

12. Friend, Paul doesn't want you merely to be a Christian. He wants you to flourish in your walk with Christ. And *the secret to maximum Christian flourishing is simply to be captivated by Christ.*