October 8/9, 2022

Victory or Bondage

Rooted in Christ Series

Colossians 2:6-15

Pastor Bryan Clark

A few weeks ago, Paul told us in chapter one that his prayer for us is that we would be filled with super knowledge concerning the plan and purpose of God, in order to live life more skillfully. I talked about that word "filled" as a word that was used to describe a ship that is packed with cargo. But we don't have a lot of ships coming through Nebraska, so we changed the imagery to a trailer, and packing our trailer with super knowledge concerning the plan and purpose of God. So, I want to keep that imagery going.

So, let's imagine that you're going to take a trip into the wilderness, and your plan is to survive an entire year in the wilderness. You have your trailer, and you can only fit so much in the trailer. So, what do you need? You start to do some research and try to think it through, and it's all overwhelming to you. So you hire a wilderness survival expert. This person has spent most of his adult life in the wilderness. He looks at your trailer, and he assures you, "If you listen to me and pack what I tell you, you will not only survive, I'm telling you, you will thrive in the wilderness."

So you purchase all this stuff. It's laid out all over the yard. He assures you all of it will fit in the trailer, but it's going to be tight. Along come your neighbors, your friends, your coworkers, people that are passing by. They see what's going on and they all have their opinions about what you need to survive in the wilderness. So, they start bringing stuff and they lay out their stuff all over the yard. Now you have far more than could possibly fit in the trailer. For every one thing that your neighbor or coworker brought, that you put in the trailer, is one thing that the expert said you needed that you will have to leave behind.

So here's the big question. Whose voice are you going to listen to? That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to the book of Colossians. If you're new with us, we're working our way through the New Testament book of Colossians. We find ourselves in chapter 2, verse 6, that starts with the word: **Therefore**. In light of what we've already learned in chapter 2, which is two things Paul longs for us as believers: To truly understand the riches that are ours in Christ, in order to find the life that our soul is seeking after. But he has a concern. There are false teachers among them, and the concern is that they will be deceived through persuasive arguments, through some smooth talking, to believe things that aren't true.

> **Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,**
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> (*NASB, Colossians 2:6)

That Greek word that's translated **received** is a word that's almost always used for receiving some sort of teaching, some block of truth that is passed on from generation to generation. So it would be the idea that God told Paul; Paul told Epaphras; Epaphras told them. So they've **received** it. This is the truth concerning the person and work of Jesus. He says of **Christ Jesus the Lord**. It's worth noting, this is the only time in the New Testament Paul uses this wording. It likely has to do

with what the false teachers are saying. So it's a huge description of Jesus Christ, meaning the *Anointed One, the Messiah, Jesus, the long-awaited Savior, God in the flesh, Lord, the supremacy of Christ*. This is God in the flesh. It's a huge description of Jesus. This is what they were taught. This is what has been passed down, **So walk in it**. In other words, "Understand it, believe it, and live it out."

Whenever I see the word **walk**, I can't help but think, going back to Genesis chapter three, there's this amazing description that before sin entered the world, God would come down to the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day, meaning the evening, and He would *walk with Adam and Eve*, and they would just enjoy being together in paradise. It's hard to even process what that must have been like. But because of sin that has all been lost. But because of Jesus, now God is putting the pieces back together. One day we will walk with God like that. Now we're beginning to experience that relationship with God, through Christ. So he says, "Walk in it; live like this is true."

In order to kind of unpack this concept of walking, then he lists four participles: rooted, built up, established, and overflowing. So he says, beginning in verse 7:

> **…having been** (past tense) ***firmly*** **rooted**. This is a verb tense that means this is something that happened the moment you trusted Jesus as Savior. It's automatic. What God does for you is *in Christ*; he roots you *in Christ*. The verb tense would mean it happened automatically, but the impact or the effect goes on as we're walking. The second and third are present tense. This, then, is the effect of that:
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> **…*and now* having been built up in Him and established in your faith.** Now most scholars say those are like construction metaphors. So, you shift from the imagery of a tree being rooted, to construction metaphors—that something is built on a foundation and made stronger. To me, what makes more sense is if you keep it in the tree analogy. What he simply said is the moment you trust Jesus as Savior, you have been rooted to Christ, automatically. The effect of that is then you start growing, and you become stronger. That's, in essence, what he just said, **built up in Him and established in your faith**. It could be translated in ***the*** faith, which I think is better. Paul uses that terminology a lot. In ***the*** faith is a reference to the body of doctrine, the truth that we believe about Jesus. So it fits the discussion. This is what was passed down, and this is the basis by which you are growing and you are becoming stronger. That's also made evident by the statement:
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> **…just as you were instructed**. Now, it's really important to understand those three participles are all in the passive voice, which means this is not something *you do*; this is something *God does*. We just have to always remind ourselves that Christianity is not a try harder religion. The message is not to go out there and try harder. The message is primarily to understand and to believe what's true, in order that you might live out this truth. So what's happening is: He's rooted you; He's growing you; He's making you stronger. The fourth one is active. The result of that is you're:
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> **…overflowing with gratitude**. If we stick with our imagery, you're not just going to survive in the wilderness. You have everything you need to thrive, **overflowing with gratitude**.

Now, at the end of the day, everybody lives out their belief system. If I want to know what you really believe in your heart of hearts, I just have to watch the way you live. Because, ultimately, you live your belief system. So what Paul is saying is, "This is what was passed down to you. You need to understand it. You need to believe it. And if you believe it, then you will live it."

I mentioned the concern a few weeks ago, that I think more and more there's a problem with many sincere Christians who, I think, honestly, in their heart of hearts, they do want to follow Jesus. But there is a huge problem, and that is the trailer is empty. You get to the wilderness. You open the trailer, and, in your moment of truth, what do you know? The trailers empty. You simply don't understand and believe the truth you need to know in order to thrive in a dark and confusing culture. So that's what Paul is talking about here. Verse 8:

> **See to it that no one takes you captive**…(*how?*)…**through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men,**

See to it is a warning. We'd probably say something like, "Hey, heads up. Here's the concern: **that no one takes you captive**." That's a really strong word. It means to kidnap you. It means to take you and haul you off as a prisoner of war. This is what's true about who you are in Christ. You have everything you need to thrive in the wilderness, but if you don't know that and understand that, the enemy is going to come along and take you hostage, and you're going to be miserable.

So he says, "How does that happen?" **…through philosophy and empty deception**. Empty deception describes the philosophy. So, we have to be a little bit careful here. He's not saying philosophy is bad. As a matter of fact, it's a neutral term. It just means the love of knowledge or the love of wisdom. The concern here is that this is philosophy that is passed down from the traditions of men. In other words, it's just people's opinions, just people's feelings, just people's ideas. You have all these people in your neighborhood who think they know what you need to take to survive in the wilderness. The problem is, they've never been to the wilderness, yet they're telling you how to do it. That's the idea: So, it's hollow. It's empty…and it's not true.

So let's imagine, again, all this stuff, and we're trying to figure out what we're going to put in the trailer. Your neighbor brings you six big boxes, and your neighbor is very persuasive, and convinces you that your neighbor knows, "This is what you need." So, you pack those boxes, which means there's quite a bit of stuff the expert told you you're going to need, that you have to leave behind. You get to the wilderness, and now, in your moment of truth, you open your trailer. You pull out the boxes; you open them up, and they are empty! Hollow! There's nothing in them! This is now disastrous! That's what Paul is talking about. That's the danger of packing your trailer full of empty philosophies, which are just people's opinions. He also says:

> **…according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ**. So there's a lot of discussion about what that phrase **elementary principles** means. There are three primary camps. It could refer to just the primary elements of the earth, like earth and wind and fire, like that. And there were spirits attached to either of those, to all of those. Or second of all, and probably more commonly: elemental spirits. It could be translated that way. So it's the idea of worshiping spirits or some sort of activity like that.

But I think what makes the most sense, **elementary**, think of elementary school. The word just means the ABC's. It's the ABC's of the operating system of the world. And what is that? The ABC's of the operating system of the world is, "You can do it. You can make yourself more. You can make yourself more spiritual. You can make yourself more before God." It's this whole idea that if "I" do something, I can make myself more. What I have in Christ is good, but it's not enough. I have to do some more things to make it better. That's the ABC's of the philosophy of the world. I think that's what he's talking about, because it's contrary, rather than "in Christ". So, in other words, is Christ sufficient for what you need, or do you need to do something to make it better? So, what do you have in Christ? Verse 9:

> **For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;** (Vs. 9-10)

That phrase, the **fullness of Deity dwells**, or the **fullness of Deity lives**, it's a huge phrase. It's the only time in the New Testament this phrase is used. It's the only time this word **Deity** is used. It's hard to describe how big this term is. But everything that describes God in any way, is contained in this word, **Deity**. So the fullness of all that God is, is contained in Jesus **in bodily form**. He's filled with the *fullness of God*. And the result of that is **you are made complete**.

Now, this word **complete** is a completely different word than the word we saw in chapter one, verse 28. Actually, I wish they didn't translate it **complete**. The word means **full**, *full to the brim, as full as it could possibly be*. It's actually a play on words—you are *filled to capacity with the fullness of God* when you are in Christ. So think of it this way: all the fullness of God is massive. I could never begin to contain that. But I am filled to *my* capacity with the fullness of God.

So, let's imagine that we're at the ocean, and you have a container, and you're wanting to fill this container to capacity with ocean water. Well, there are several different ways you could do it. You could scoop it out, and you could pour it in, and you're always wondering, "Is it completely full? Could I get a couple more drops in there?" And then I splash some out of it, and I've got to put more in there. Or, you can wade out up to your waist, take your container, and plunge it under the water. Now holding it under the water, it is filled to its fullness. It is not possible you could put one more drop in there. It is *to its capacity*. So, if you imagine the ocean to be the fullness of God, so big and vast, and that container is me, I have been absolutely filled to capacity with the fullness of God. That's what I have in Christ. And if that's true, what do the false teachers offer me? What do the philosophies of man offer me? What is it I'm missing or lacking that can be added to that?

He also reminds us that, that same Christ has been made **head over all rule and authority**. To put it in kind of everyday terms, He's the top of the heap. He's the boss. He's the big dog. There is nobody over this God. So, if He is at the top of the heap, the most powerful of all, and you're filled with the fullness of this God in Christ, you tell me, "What is it you're missing that you need to thrive in the wilderness?"

He goes on then in verse 11:

> **…and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;**

So you say, "What does that mean?" In order to understand this, you have to go back and understand what circumcision was. It is likely that there were Jewish false teachers that were telling these believers in Colossae, "The Jesus thing is good…but it's not enough. You need to also fulfill some of the requirements of the Law. For starters, you need to be circumcised." And what Paul is saying is, "Actually, you've experienced the ultimate circumcision." Go all the way back to Abraham. God made the promise to Abraham that, through his family line, would come the Savior of the world. It would be passed on from generation to generation to generation, until finally the Messiah would come. But there was also a reminder that this is not something you can pull off yourself. This is something God will have to do. It will be miraculous.

So, the sign of the covenant was that the male instrument through whom this seed would travel, would have the flesh of the foreskin removed and discarded. and it was symbolic of the fact that you, in your flesh, can't pull this off. You can't produce the Messiah. It will have to be a miracle from God. This is why God waited until Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 years old to have Isaac. It was to make the point loud and clear, "Hey, in case you didn't get it, it's a miracle!" It's God's way of saying, "I did this…and I will produce the long-awaited Messiah."

So for hundreds of years, the Jewish people believed the sign of the covenant was that God would one day do a miracle and bring forth the Messiah—God in the flesh—the Savior of the world. What these Greek, these Gentile believers now had to come to understand, was that Jesus was the fulfillment of that promise. No longer was the symbol necessary, because they were living in the fulfillment—that they had experienced the ultimate circumcision not made with human hands. The body of flesh that was removed was their attempts to make themselves righteous. All their religious activities, all their religious stuff, all that they were doing to somehow gain favor with God, were just acts of the flesh. They were the ABC's of the world system. But the moment they trusted Jesus as Savior, all of those words, all that religious activity was removed and tossed aside, and it's on the basis of Christ and Christ alone, that they could experience salvation. This is the ultimate circumcision. So if that's true, why would they need the symbol, when they're now living in the reality of what Jesus has done? He goes on then in verse 12:

> **…having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him**…*(how?)*…**through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.**

So now there's a new symbol that's symbolic of this newfound faith in Christ: baptism. That **in baptism,** we publicly identify ourselves with the death, the burial, the resurrection of Jesus. We are identifying that it's not through my good works. It's not through a bunch of religious activity. It's through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus that I stand saved. Does the baptism save them? Of course not. He just said **through faith.** It's faith; it's belief that saves them. Baptism is the symbol by which we identify with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Verse 13:

> **When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh,** *(back when you were spiritually dead, and you were trying to save yourself)* **He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions**…(How did that happen? Verse 14:) **…having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees**

against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

This is a very powerful imagery. In the Roman world, you would take a certificate and you would handwrite all of the debt that you owed to the lender, whatever the situation was. As a matter of fact, **the certificate of debt,** the Greek word used there actually means *handwriting*. You handwrite the certificate. These are all the ways that I've sinned. These are all the ways I've transgressed God's law. These are all the ways I've rebelled. These are all the ways I've messed up. This is the debt that I owe. It's essentially an IOU. And at the end, you'd sign your name to it, as the debtor, identifying, "This is the debt I owe."

We talked a few weeks ago about this idea of presenting your resume to God. It may have lots of good things on the resume, but there's a problem. There are lots of bad things—all the ways that you've sinned, all the ways you've failed, all the ways you've transgressed God's law, all the ways you've not measured up. And no amount of good works or religious activity makes that go away. So God looks at your resume, and it's like, "Well, there are some good pages here, *but* you're not qualified because of all this stuff on your resume. This is the IOU. This is certificate of debt, and it's hostile toward us, because it condemns us. Every single thing on that list condemns me and separates me from God. This is a huge problem. Now, what do we do?

When the Romans would crucify someone, they would take something and write on it: These are the reasons why this person is being crucified. This is the debt this person owes. This is why they're being put to death. So, this is the imagery. Jesus takes your handwritten certificate, your acknowledgement, "Yes, this is true; I've messed up in all these ways." And He takes it, and He nails it to the cross. He pays the debt, and He blots out everything on it. And in return, He offers you forgiveness and new life in Christ. Once for all time, Jesus conquered sin and death. Your sins were paid for. There's nothing more you need to do to pay for your sins. There's nothing you can do to make it right. No matter what any false teacher tells you, your debt has been paid—paid in full—nailed to the cross, offered to you freely as a gift of God's grace that you receive by faith. As a matter of fact, the victory is so complete that, verse 15:

When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

The idea of **disarmed** is the idea of a battle. Somebody loses, and they're completely disarmed, and they're captured. This is describing a Roman victory parade. When Rome would conquer some other army, they would have a parade through the city. And in the parade would be the victors followed by the defeated soldiers, the defeated kings, the defeated army, and all the spoils of victory. It was intended to be a public shame and humiliation! **Rulers and authorities** that thought somehow, they could defeat Jesus, were ultimately crushed by Jesus on the cross, where He won the ultimate victory over sin and death! Therefore, they have been publicly shamed and defeated. They offer nothing. There's nothing they can do to diminish or take away the salvation that God has granted you in Christ. Total victory! In light of that, we go back to verse 6:

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord,

In other words, this is what you were taught. This is what we told you is true. This is what you need to pack the trailer with. Don't listen to what the false teachers are saying. You don't need any of that. You're not lacking anything. You're not missing anything. You're not short anything. Just listen, understand, and believe.

…so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted.

God has done this to you. And now He's growing you and He's making you stronger, according to this great truth…so that you might **overflow with gratitude**! No matter what this world throws at you, no matter what's next around the corner, no matter what anyone else tries to tell you, the truth is: in Christ, you have everything you need. You're not missing anything. You're not lacking anything. There's not something more you need to do but to understand it, to believe it, in order that you might live it. You can do far more—regardless of what comes next in the culture—you can do far more than survive. You've been given everything you need in order to thrive in Christ.

Our Father, we celebrate this radical truth this morning. We are filled with the fullness of God in Christ. God, help us to understand and believe the truth that we might thrive in a dark and difficult world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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FALL 2022 // WEEK 5

Life Group Questions

Colossians – Rooted in Christ // October 8-9, 2022

Victory or Bondage // Colossians 2:6-15



All month we are focusing on loving our neighbors, one way to do this is to **Live Intentionally**. This can look like drawing a map of your street, writing down your neighbor's names, and praying for them each day. Try this as a way to love your neighbor!

Introduction

Prior weeks in our Colossians series have provided a firm foundation to what Paul will say in the coming chapters of the letter. Paul writes with gratitude, in prayer for the church of Colossae proclaiming to them the hope and fruit of the gospel. Reminding them that they are qualified in Christ. Pointing them to the supremacy of Christ and how His work on the cross makes us complete. This week we move forward in Paul's message to acknowledge how our salvation offers us the opportunity to be alive in Christ and rooted in Him.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

1) Think back to when you were younger. **Did you have house rules? What were they and which one was particularly challenging for you to follow?**

2) In our study of Colossians thus far, what is something you are learning and have taken to heart?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:

    a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
    b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
    c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you

2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group. *Consider reading* ***Colossians 2:1-15*** *to keep the flow of thought of the letter from the previous week.*

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

1) The beginning "Therefore" of the passage indicates that what Paul would like to say next hinges on what he just said. Summarize Colossians 2:1-5 from last week's text. **What is Paul's vantage point going into this section of the letter? What type of context does this provide as we take a closer look at verses 6-15?**

2) Verses six and seven form the theme of our Colossians series *Rooted in Christ*. **What are some descriptor words you find in these two verses that define the ways of someone that is rooted in Christ?**

   What does Paul intend when he encourages the Colossians to *walk in Him*? What is our part in the journey of maturing in faith? How does this lead to overflowing gratitude?

   How is the Holy Spirit currently building you up in Christ? Where are you at in your journey towards a mature faith? Share what is happening in your walk now that excites you, and also ways you want to grow.

3) Paul provides a sober warning to those walking in Christ. **What is the warning in verse 8? What do you think is Paul's biggest concern for the Christ followers in Colossae?**

Pastor Bryan referred again to the imagery of a trailer packed full of super knowledge about Christ and what He has done and is doing in our lives. He mentioned that others may come and suggest other things we need in our trailer to survive. **What are some current-day religious philosophies or traditions that people might suggest we pack in our trailers?**

What are things you have tried to pack in your trailer from time to time to help you be built up in Christ? How did those things end up leading you astray or into bondage?

4) Paul immediately suggests that our tendency to living in bondage should be exchanged for a life in accordance with Christ. Verses 9-12 explain this further by pointing us back to the sufficiency of Christ and our relation to Him. **What does Paul say about Jesus in Colossians 2:9-12?** Notice the *in Him* and *with Him* language to list attributes of Christ below.

In light of these attributes you listed, what does Paul also say about us as Christ followers in verses 9-12. Notice the *you* language to determine attributes of someone living in accordance with Christ.

How are you currently being challenged to live in accordance with Christ? What part of human tradition holds you captive? How can your life group specifically pray for you about this challenge and be an encouragement to you?

5) In pointing us to the sufficiency of Christ, Paul then adds another layer that draws our focus on what Jesus did for us. **What does Paul say Jesus did for us in Colossians 2:13-15 and what was our status before Christ's work?**

Where do you see the permanency in these verses that what Christ did is sufficient, final and cannot be undone?

How is this truth a comfort to you? When are there moments when you don't fully live in accordance with this truth? Share out of a current or past experience.

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.**

Study Scripture: Take a deeper dive into the letters of Paul as the topic of walking in accordance with Christ transcends across multiple epistles. Compare Colossians 2:6 with Galatians 3:1-5 to gain a more complete picture of our assurance of faith over legalism.

Look Inward: Take time to fully think through and list areas where you see legalism seeping into your life. Identify three tangible steps you can take toward fully living in accordance with Christ. Then enter into a moment of prayer to:

Praise God for His sufficiency.

Surrender your propensity to perform to earn God's favor.

Ask that He would place someone in your life to hold you accountable.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say "Amen" aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?

Next Week: Read Colossians 2:16-23