



“Don’t Be Taken Captive”

Colossians 2:6-10

January 23, 2022

Well, good morning, Bethel Grace! I am bringing a message to you once again from the entryway here at the Saltzmann home. Hopefully, we are reaching the end of this time of quarantine. I’ve got to let you know that I think the main thing that I have been suffering from so far is cabin fever!

At some point along the way here, I have started referring to this quarantine as house arrest. It can be kind of frustrating when you really want to be out and amongst people. Some of you know that much better than I do. But we do appreciate your prayers for the week and weeks ahead for healing, for health, and for patience.

Now this morning as we continue in the book of Colossians, let me remind you that we are reading a book that was written by a man who actually was on house arrest. This is one of Paul’s prison epistles. Paul was incarcerated in Rome. He was awaiting trial before Caesar Nero for charges related to his ministry for Jesus. Paul, he was literally chained to a Roman guard at all times in that small apartment in the capital city of the Empire.

That being the case, even as he heard the sound of the chains on his wrists, there was a much more serious form of captivity that Paul was concerned about as he continued writing this letter to the church. He knew that falsehood was spreading in the city and in the streets of Colossae. He knew that false doctrine was knocking at the door of the church. Paul was very much concerned about a form of plundering that might take place there in the city of Colossae.

No, Paul was not having visions of Captain Hook or Captain Jack Sparrow. He didn’t know who those men were. Far more seriously and into the realm of reality, Paul was concerned about dark spiritual powers that were and are at work in this world in an unseen way, spreading falsehood through largely unwitting but responsible human agents.

Paul was concerned about false doctrine that was being spread that could take people in the church hostage; that could take them captive. So even though the Colossian church was a strong and orderly church, Paul was very concerned because he even knew that good soldiers could be taken captive.

So with these things in his heart, Paul provided the instruction and the warning and the perspective that comes to us in Colossians Chapter 2 and Verses 6 through 10. Let’s read what is here for us from the Word of the Lord. Colossians Chapter 2, starting in Verse 6:

“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

At the heart of what we just read is that the church of God is given a responsibility. I wonder if you see this in Verse 8, where Paul said:

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy

You see to this. You take responsibility for this. You watch out for this, he said. Here in this language of captivity, the Greek scholars tell us that this language vividly expresses the danger that believers may be carried off as plunder by an alien and fundamentally anti-Christian form of teaching.

That comes to us from a book written by Douglas Moo on Colossians. They let us know that this language of being taken captive is like being plundered. So Paul was saying, “Don’t let yourselves be taken as plunder, as pirate’s booty with some false spirituality that can take you captive. Watch out!” Watch out, he said. See to it.

What we have here in Verses 6 through 10, is that it continues in the stream of thought that we read and studied last. You will recall that Paul was concerned that the church of God not be diluted by plausible arguments.

The concern is that the landscape of the planet earth is filled with teachings and falsehoods that would lure people away from the grace and the truth that is found in Christ and in Christ alone. So Paul continued this stream of thought and this time, adding to that language of watching out for plausible arguments, he used the language of captivating philosophy and empty deceit.

Take a look at Verse 8 again. Look at your Bibles. Colossians Chapter 2 and Verse 8:

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

Paul used this language of philosophy as he was telling us what to watch out for. This is not a blanket statement against the entire field of philosophy as we know it today. The word philosophy that we see here in Verse 8, the English word is essentially the same as the Greek term that underlies it. It is a compound word, bringing two words together—Phileo and Sophia. Phileo being a warm kind of love, and Sophia being the word for wisdom. In essence that is what philosophy is. It is the love of wisdom. It is the pursuit of understanding.

So through the course of human history, human beings have been pursuing the knowledge of all things actual; what is the reality of this universe and this world; how are things actually taking place; what is real, and how do we understand life and conduct ourselves accordingly. This is kind of a nutshell of what is going on with the language of philosophy—the love of wisdom.

However, here is the rub. That's a worthy pursuit but the human race is in fact fallen in sin, and our minds are in fact darkened, and there are demonic influences that are kind of moving us in a certain direction. That direction being away from Christ. Out of philosophy there have emerged a great many philosophies—patterns of thought.

Some of them may be helpful, but a great many of them are harmful because, once again, they lead people away from Christ and the knowledge of His unique, saving grace. Any philosophy, any world view that does what is harmful, they take people captive. This is what Paul warned about when he used this language.

The reality is that every generation has false philosophies and world views that prevail and they become widespread. This is something that the church of Jesus Christ is called to watch out for and to be discerning of. How are such philosophies described in Verse 8? Let your eyes rest upon that verse again.

First they are deceitful, it says. Empty deceit. Verse 8 says that they are “according to human tradition.” That means that these falsehoods are conveyed through human beings. And it says that they are “according to the elemental spirits of the world.” This is kind of a complicated term in the underlying Greek. Therefore, you will see it translated in different ways in some of the English translations,

It talks about the principle things. Kind of like the ABCs or the first things. Elementary, the first things. So, in some of the spiritual writings of antiquity, this word would be used to speak of spirits that were inhabiting the earth before humans beings. Demons would qualify. That is why Paul used the term here. All of that is to say that these false philosophies that have been found in the world, while they come through human beings, they are demonic.

Finally, Verse 8 says they are “not according to Christ.” So there is this call to discernment. Watch out. See to it that you are not taken captive. Paul warned not only the Colossians, but us Californians too.

Throughout history there have been such false philosophies. In the days of Jesus and the Apostle Paul there was in the land of Israel the philosophy of Pharisaic Legalism that had grown to such forceful prominence in the Holy Land. As we will see as we move forward in Colossians 2, it was a species of legalistic Jewish spiritualism that was spreading in Colossae. That is the particular philosophy that Paul was concerned about for them.

But there are so many more through the generations. Today across the globe in the Middle East, it is the philosophy of Islam. In India it is the philosophy of Hinduism. These are false world views that are inspired by demonic forces leading people away from the Messiah.

Here in the Western World there is the philosophy of Naturalism, that there is no God. But there is another world view, another philosophy, that we as the church need to be especially careful of, because it is spreading with such force and with such influence across the Western World,

through the United States, into Southern California, so this has affected people that you and I know and love.

This false philosophy that we need to be so very careful about is that of personal autonomy which comes with its conjoined sibling of moral relativism. What is happening is that human beings who are ultimately created beings, they are rising up with a sense of personal autonomy, declaring in essence, I am the captain of my own ship. I am the lord of my own life. I am who I say I am. I am what I declare myself to be. I will do what I want to do. I will go the direction that my yearnings and desires take me. I will live how I want to live. It is the whole issue of personal autonomy. This all boils down to the doctrine of personal lordship. We are seeing that very radically expressed in the world around us.

Not only is there this doctrine of personal autonomy and moral relativism that allows for it, but it is also fueled by what is taking place with the redefinition of tolerance. When purely defined, tolerance is all about human beings dwelling with other human beings that they disagree with peaceably.

But the new tolerance is the understanding is that we not just dwell peaceably with one another, it is that we celebrate one another in whatever we declare ourselves to be, and whatever we declare ourselves to believe. There is a mutual affirmation that is to be taking place. This is a very widespread philosophy and world view that is manifesting itself on how people are handling gender, marriage, sexuality, and whole assortment of other things.

Paul was telling the church in every general terms to be aware of the philosophies that would come and take Christians captive; these plausible arguments , things that would compel us away from Christ.

All of this language and understanding of personal autonomy and moral relativism, it is totally and completely antithetical with the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and recognizing that God and particularly the Triune God, God in Christ is our Creator, that God is our authority, and that God is our Redeemer, that there is sin to be forgiven and repented of as we follow Christ by the power of His grace, according to His teachings and His truths and His Law.

We don't obey the Law in order to be saved. Not a single one of us could because we are sinners, but having been forgiven and having been redeemed and born again, those who come to Christ are going follow in His ways as He is planting His truth in our lives. We, by the power of the Holy Spirit, are going to be submissive to His Word.

Paul was saying to watch out and to be careful. There is a great call to vigilance that comes to us here in Colossians Chapter 2 and Verse 8. Paul said, "You see to it that no one takes you captive."

As we continue forward, I want for us to notice gloriously, beautifully, and wonderfully how Paul sounded forth the warning, but clothing the warning and the admonition with the knowledge of the power that is going to keep us free from captivating philosophies.

Look at the paragraph again, look at your Bibles, the call to vigilance in Verse 8 is framed by two epic statements of core Christianity. This is so good! These two epic statements of the essence Christianity, they identify where the strength for this is to be found.

So in Verses 6 and 7, we have one of the great portraits of discipleship given to us in the pages of the Bible. Then in Verses 9 and 10, we have one of the great pictures of the believer's union with Christ and fullness in Christ found in the pages of the Scripture. That is where the power comes from!

Now we will frame the second half of this message like this: to strengthen you in a world of captivating falsehood, and I am not using the word captivating like she is so captivating. It is not in the positive but in the negative sense of the word captivating. It is like something that wants to take you as plunder.

In a world of captivating falsehood, first, you are called to discipleship in Christ Jesus. Second, you are given fullness in Christ Jesus. It is in that discipleship and in that fullness that He brings us into, by grace, that we will find the strength. So let's look at what is here for us. The first point:

To strengthen you in a world filled with captivating falsehoods:

1. You are called to discipleship in Christ (2:6-7)

Verses 6 and 7:

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

There at the end of Verse 6, it says to walk in Christ. That is the exhortation. Have you received Christ the Lord? So walk in the One that you have received. That's what Paul was saying to the church.

The language of walking with Christ is one of the great wonderful pictures of discipleship found in the pages of Scripture. When we read the Gospel account we see how Jesus called Peter and Andrew and James and John and the twelve and they followed Him. They were walking with Him, and they were learning from Him. They were observing His example.

They were watching as Christ dealt so graciously and tenderly with those who were wracked with disease; those who were downtrodden and contrite. They also saw how He had such strength and boldness against the spiritual abuses and abusers of the day.

We see how they were following Him, seeing His pattern of living, hearing His instruction about the Kingdom. And as they were taking all of these things in and as the Holy Spirit would soon be really impressing these things upon them, they were being built up and strengthened in their Messiah.

Here in the Word, the disciples heard Christ say, "Follow Me." Now here in this text, from the Word, the Spirit of Christ calls you and empowers you and urges you, "Follow Him. Walk in Him. Abide in Him." It is the discipleship walk.

It is as we walk in Christ by taking in the truths of His Living Word and by calling to Him in prayer, Him speaking into our lives, us responding and speaking our praises and our burdens, this is how we engage in discipleship. We do this in our private times and with one another.

This life of discipleship that guards us against the captivity that this text is talking about, this discipleship is vividly displayed in this text. It is portrayed beautifully. Notice with me now how Paul used pictures from three different spheres to portray the value that comes as we are walking in Christ.

First, you will notice that there is a metaphor from the agricultural realm. At the end of Verse 6, "Walk in Him." And then in the beginning of Verse 7, "Rooted in Him." I wonder if there are any gardeners in our midst. I actually know that there is at least one, because I just saw a classic post on Facebook from that person.

Diane, I'm enjoying this with you! Our sister, Diane, posted this word picture on her Facebook. It said, "Who are we? We're the gardeners." Then it said, "What do we want? We want all the plants!" Then it said, "Where are we going to put them? We don't know!" They would figure that out later. They just want all the plants. That cracked me. I was chuckling when I saw that.

Now this text continues the extensive biblical teaching that the people of God are the gardeners of God and we know where each plant is to be planted, don't we? We are to be planted in Christ, rooted in Jesus as we walk with Him. Rooted in Him.

Gardeners and maybe some of those who are not gardeners know the vital importance of the root system. All of the nutrients for the health of the plant are absorbed through the root. The nutrients absorbed through the roots are what leads to healthy branches and vibrant fruits.

Likewise, it is as the follower of Christ is joined by the power of the Holy Spirit to Jesus and their roots are sinking into Him that their lives become strong and healthy and fruitful to the glory of the Lord. This is the first metaphor for discipleship. Walk with Him, rooted in Him.

Second, there is a picture from the realm of construction as well. I wonder if you noticed that? Some of you prefer cutting wood and swinging a hammer to soil and blossoms, so here you go. Verses 6 and 7 says, "Walk in Him that you might be built up in Him." Or being built up in Him.

This pictures a structure being built from the ground up, so that each Christian and each community of believers is being built up into a strong and solid building by the power of the God that will be able to weather the storms and the uncertainties of life. This happens as we walk with Jesus. It happens as we are in Him.

Notice that we are passive in this. Walk with Him, but being built up in Him. Christ is the One who is doing the edifying as we are walking with Him.

There is also a third picture that comes as well. This seems possibly a picture from the legal realm. Verses 6 and 7 again:

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught

Established in the faith. Once again, we learn that this language of established was used in legal documents in the ancient world. This terminology was used to validate accounts and to solidify estates. The picture here is in a sense of getting the case closed.

We are pictured with Christ, walking with Him and as we do, we will be settled in the faith, established the faith—meaning that historic body of doctrine coming from Christ and His apostles that speaks to us of the truth of who God is and all that He has done for us in Christ. We will be settled and established in these things as we walk with Him.

So in a world filled with plausible arguments and captivating philosophies, there are some things, brothers and sisters in the Lord, that you need to get settled. The Spirit is going to be the One who is going to help you get settled in these things, but you need to get settled.

What is your view of the Bible? What do you believe about the Bible? Is it the authoritative Word of God? Get it settled in your heart. What do you believe about God? Do you believe that this is a universe filled with many gods? Or do you believe that there is one God who has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one God, three in one, the One Triune God? What do you believe about God? Get it settled.

What do you believe about Jesus? Do you believe that He is the incarnation of God and that He came into the world in order to live a life of righteous perfection as a gift in place of sinners, and that He died on the cross, spilling His blood that those sinners might be cleansed and that He took the punishment their sins deserved, and that He rose on the third day with victory over death in His grip. What do you believe about Jesus? Get it settled.

What do you believe about sin? Is sin a reality or is it not? Is it a problem that Christ and Christ alone can solve for any of us? These are things that we get settled, case closed, as we walk with Christ. In a world with false philosophies, this is what is being urged upon us. We come to the Lord, saying, “Lord, have your way. Do these things in me in regard to this language of being settled on things.”

Somebody might say, “Pastor Jeff, that is so encouraging and I want that, but I must be honest with you, sometimes I have doubts. I want to believe but sometimes I struggle in the things that I want to believe.”

Well, new flash, so do the rest of us. We have chapters of life and times in life where we experience doubt. I do, and I appreciate when men and women of God acknowledge that they do too. That shouldn't surprise us because what we learn in the pages of Scripture is that from beginning to end, the tactic of Satan is to cast doubt upon God's Word. So we do face that and we do battle that but praise God, that He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

So we got before the Lord, saying, "Lord, my heart is prone to wander. I have such frailties in me. So, Lord, will You raise me up and will you fill me with Your power that I might hear this discipleship call of Jesus and be strong and settled in Him; that I will be built up in Him; that I will be rooted and nourished and healthy and fruit-bearing in Him.? God, will You do this work in me?" And we must come back daily, saying, "Lord, let this be Your work in my life and help me to walk in obedience to what You are empowering in me?"

This is what is laid out for us here in this text. There is one more aspect of this discipleship life that we see here that we need to take in. This is no afterthought. It says at the very end of this passage on what it is and how it is when we walk in Christ:

⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Abounding. Overflowing with gratitude. This is vitally important as we are walking in this world with all of its forms of deceptions. This is why this overflowing thankfulness is so important. We are prone toward discouragement and the disillusioned heart is the susceptible heart. It is when we are disillusioned that those plausible arguments might enter into our ears.

So the remedy to that is that we be filled with the Holy Spirit given to see the glory of the love of Jesus Christ manifested in the cross, where He died for our sin because He loves us. We have to have eyes to see the provision of life that He gives as confirmed in His resurrection from the dead.

We have to pray that the Spirit will give us eyes that continue to see how Jehovah Jirah provides for us and loves us, so that gratitude will fill our lives. Can we confess that left to ourselves we are prone to be negative? It is so easy to point out what is wrong and to identify the things that are lacking. Most of us are built that way.

We see what is lacking. That's how we are prone, and we need to pray that the Lord will constantly be giving us eyes to see how His goodness and His mercy are following us all the days of our lives. We have the tendency to maximize what's missing and take for granted what is being given to us by God.

While we do need to be those who are pursuing growth and to shore up the areas where we are weak in the church and in our lives, we must also be saying, "Lord, give me the eyes to see what You are doing and how You have provided for me and for us?" This gratitude is so vitalizing!

Negativity is draining. I feel the energy going out of me when I'm being negative and when I'm around people who are being negative. But when you are among people who have eyes to see how God has been good to us, it lifts the soul. So, hence, thanksgiving is a work of the Holy Spirit.

We need to pray that the Spirit would mass produce thanksgiving among us to drastically reduce our susceptibility to any deceptive and captivating false philosophy. So, by command of the King, let it be the case by the power of the Spirit of God who lives in us and who is among, that every worship gathering be an occasion for thanksgiving.

Let every Home Fellowship Group and every Sunday community be a time where we are looking to express thanks to God. Let every Elders Meeting, every Deacon and Deaconess Meeting, every Staff Meeting, every AWANA Meeting, every DOXA or Koinonia Meeting be a time to express thanks to God. If the word of Colossians is living in us, we are going to see the repetitive calls to gratitude that the Spirit empower in us as we are abiding in Christ.

As we move to the end of this message, this topic of thanksgiving brings us beautifully into the next point. What is at the top of the thanksgiving list? You have heard me say this many times around the Thanksgiving Holiday. Jesus is at the top of the thanksgiving list!. We continue:

To be given strength in a world filled with captivating philosophies. First, you are called to discipleship in Christ. Second:

2. You are given fullness in Christ (2:9-10)

Verse 8, then see this in Verses 9 and 10:

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Follower of Christ, you have been given fullness in Christ. In Verses 9 and 10, the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ and the doctrine of the indwelling of Christ are coming joined together. First we have this awesome teaching that in Christ, God has assumed human flesh. He has become a human being.

We also see that in Christ, God is taking residence within the life and the heart of the one who follows Jesus. You have been given fullness in Jesus by the Spirit of Christ, the Head of all rule and authority. We have been given fullness in Christ the Lord, the Savior, the Creator.

What a contrast this is to the captivating philosophies we have been talking about. Do you remember in Verse 8, they are characterized as empty deceit, or that which is hollow, void of any real substance?

I wonder how many of you know what a placebo is. Now in the same way that a placebo is devoid of any medicinal value to heal the body, so the fallen philosophies of this world do not have the value to heal the soul. People come seeking fullness, but they in fact leave with the soul empty still.

Yet, in contrast to all of this, the promise for the believer is that in Christ you have been filled in Him who is the head of all rule and authority. In Christ the fullness of deity dwells bodily—all of the attributes of God; all of the immeasurable power of the Lord; all of the perfections of God dwells in Christ and by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, it comes to indwell in you.

Jesus is the head of all rule and authority. He is the top dog. He is the King of the Cosmic Hill. He is the Alpha. He is the Omega. The beginning and the end. The first and the last. He is the One who comes to reside within the hearts of those who trust in Him. In Christ we have all that we need, so we go before the Lord, calling upon Him, asking for more and more awareness of Christ in us and more of His power released in us.

In Christ there is unthinkable fullness available to the human heart and soul. Jesus even said, in John 7:38:

³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

So we trust in Jesus and we ask for His fullness in our lives.

God bless you, Bethel Grace. May these truths encourage us and empower us and fortify us. May we be ever vigilant, walking in the Lordship of Jesus, knowing that He is the King and Master, and that there are people in captivity, and He is going to use us to bring them from those dominions into the freedom that comes in walking in His truth and under His authority and in His lead. That is what we are designed for and that is where life is.

With this, let's close in prayer and let's ask the Lord to be the One leading us and guiding us every step of the way, as make our way to the Royal Kingdom.