



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Colossians 2: 6-10

Lesson 7 of 15

2018

"Jerusalem or Athens"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Mark. We are continuing our studies in the book of Colossians. We're in chapter two, and we are going to look at verses six through ten. Paul has just stated his gratitude and his rejoicing to see them in 'discipline' and 'stability' in their faith. But now he has a word of caution for them—a word of warning. He writes in verse six:

<sup>6</sup>Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk in Him, <sup>7</sup>having been firmly rooted *and now* being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, *and* overflowing with gratitude.

<sup>8</sup>See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. <sup>9</sup>For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, <sup>10</sup>and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;  
Colossians 2: 6-10

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of studying it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, it's a great privilege to be with Your people on a Sunday morning. We often say that at this time and in this prayer, but it's true. It's a privilege and a necessity for us to gather together on the Lord's day to fellowship with one another. And that real fellowship, the essence of it, is here: It's when we gather together to read Your Word

and to study and pray together. So we pray that You would bless this hour together as You have blessed the previous hours of instruction in this Book; we thank you for that.

We thank you for the great privilege we have of possessing Your Word; of being able to read it at any time; and for the special privilege we have in this nation in which we live. We thank you for those privileges and liberties that we enjoy. And may we avail ourselves of those privileges, O Father—May we give great attention to the scriptures and study them; and Lord, I think this is certainly one of the exhortations and implications of the instruction that Paul gives us in our text this morning. We thank you that we can do that. We pray You would guide us and direct our thinking; that the Spirit of God who dwells within us would enable us to focus our mind on the things that we have read, and how we will consider them in the next few minutes. And we pray that in so doing, He would build us up in the faith; He would nourish us; He would strengthen us; advance us in maturity and knowledge—and in so doing equip us for the challenges that we face every day. We know some challenges are very subtle, but we pray, Lord, that You would gird us spiritually for those challenges of life.

And in doing so may it draw us close to Your Son in rich fellowship with Him. For this is what our life is for: Learning to walk with Him; knowing Him; growing in our fellowship with Him and devotion to Him. And when we do that, so many of the issues of life and the challenges of life are taken care of. So we pray that You would draw us close to Yourself; You would teach us and build us up in the faith and cause us to be more mature and developed as a result of that. Bless us spiritually, Lord. Give us rich fellowship in this hour, and in the time that follows.

And bless us materially as well. We thank you for the abundance that You give us, (and we have so much). We certainly do have much in this land in which we live, and we do thank you for that—and we should always be thankful for all that You give us. But the reality is, in Your hand, (which every believer in Jesus Christ is), we are in You. We live and move, and we exist in You. Everything that touches us is ultimately for our good, even the trials of life. We seek to avoid them, but sometimes they come—and ultimately, they are all in Your Providence for us.

So we pray for those who are going through difficulties; those who are facing medical procedures this week; those who are sick; those that are dealing with issues that we don't know about—but You know them. We pray that You would encourage, strengthen, and bless them physically and emotionally. We all go through the struggles and strains of life, the pressures of the world in which we live. —We pray that You would give those who are going through a particularly difficult time much strength. Help them to focus upon Christ, looking to Him as they run the race of faith.

And I pray that for all of us—regardless of our circumstance. If times are pleasant and restful for us now, well, that's something to give You thanks for and to praise You for. But there are times when we can be swept away or we become unaware of the difficulties that are actually there, so give us wisdom; and give us perception and strength. —Bless us, Lord, in whatever our situation of life is.

Now we pray that You bless us as we continue with our service and bless us as we sing our next hymn. Use it to prepare our hearts to focus upon this text; and this time of study together. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

One of the most famous events in the history of the American frontier happened not far from here when the Parker clan, a family of Primitive Baptists, moved to Texas. They built a fort, which was wise, but one morning while the men were outside of the fort working the fields and defenseless, Comanches came, attacked, and took the women captive. One of the women was nine-year-old Cynthia Ann Parker. When she was rescued 25 years later, she was, in her mind, a Comanche. That never changed. She died longing for the tribe; for the high plains; and worshiping the great spirit. If there is a lesson in that, it is: “Know the danger and stay in the fort.” —And that is the lesson that Paul gives in Colossians two, verses six through ten. He says, ‘Walk in Christ and see that no one takes you captive.’

A cult had come to Colossae to spread its ideas and enlist new converts. The teachers were more subtle than Comanches—and more deadly. Paul begins to expose their error in chapter two. But first he warns the Colossians. He has just praised them

for their order and stability in the faith. He had confidence in them, but still, he adds a word of caution and counsel in verse six: "Therefore, as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him..." At first glance you might think Paul is giving instruction on the Christian life, on how 'to walk' in the Christian life, how to live by faith, day by day. That's what we're to do. We enter into the Christian life through faith in Christ, and every day is to be lived in that way—by faith—trusting in Him for everything.

And, of course, that is certainly true. But that's not Paul's meaning here. He means the doctrine of Christ that you began with when you believed the gospel is the doctrine that you must continue, and not some new version of it, some false interpretation of it.

And I think we have some evidence for that idea in other places. For example, in I Corinthians 11 verse 23, Paul used this word, 'received', to speak of the doctrine of the Lord's supper that the resurrected Christ taught to him; —that he 'received', (and that he believed). Paul said, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed, took bread;" (vs23), and then he explains the practice of the Lord's supper. Paul 'received' it. He believed the doctrine that was taught to him.

And that's what Paul means here. They were taught and they 'received' doctrine. And it's stated very simply in the words, "Christ Jesus the Lord." Now that simple expression has three points that really are to be emphasized; and are to be understood in it. And *first* is, He is Christ. —Literally The Christ. He's the 'Anointed One' and that is what 'Christ' or 'Messiah' means. It's 'the one who is anointed'. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the one who is prophet, priest, and king. He's the Messiah.

*Secondly*, He is Jesus. That is, as you know, His human name. It was the name that was given to Him at His birth; which attests to Him being an historical person; attests to Him being a man of history. He had a birth. He had a human life. He had the life of a man with a genuine soul and mind and body. But in the Lord's case, this name that is given to Him, also defines His reason for becoming a genuine, true man; the

reason He entered into human history. —When the angel announced the birth of Christ to Joseph in Matthew, chapter 1, verse 21, he instructed him on the name that was to be given to Him. He said that Mary would "...bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

'Jesus' is the Greek equivalent of Joshua. It means 'Yahweh saves', or 'the Lord saves'. So when His mother called Him as a child, or when anyone called out to Jesus, they were saying the gospel. They were saying, "The Lord saves." They were saying, "Salvation is of the Lord." The Colossians believed in Him as that—as the Savior. That's what they *received*. That's the truth they were given. They trusted in Him as the one who bought them; who redeemed them through His sacrifice on the cross. He is the man, the genuine man, who died in their place. We should never forget that it is essential that we understand that Jesus Christ is a genuine human being, like you and me, yet without sin. Because only a man could be a substitute for mankind. He had to become one of us to be our substitute. And they had believed that. They understood Jesus. They understood 'the man' who was their representative. And *thirdly*, He is more than a man. He is 'the Lord'. —And that speaks of His Deity.

So this brief statement, "Christ Jesus the Lord", is really a summary of all that Paul has taught in the first chapter of this book. "He is the image of the invisible God..." he said in chapter one (vs15); He is God the Son; He is the Eternal Creator and Sustainer of the universe; He is the Redeemer of sinners. And all of this has been set forth in the first chapter. That is what they originally '*received*' when the gospel was brought to Colossae by Epaphras. The gospel is simple. It is stated very clearly, very simply, very directly in Acts, chapter 16, verse 31, when Paul and Silas gave it to this man who was in despair, who'd come to the end of himself—the Philippian jailer who said, "What must I do to be saved?" And they answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

Not, 'believe in Jesus and be baptized.' Not, 'believe and join the church.' —Now those are important things to do; We are to be baptized; we are to join ourselves to the church. —But we do that because we have been saved. Baptism is the testimony to that fact. And because we've been joined to the body of Christ, we join ourselves in the body

of Christ, and devote ourselves to that. But the gospel is very simple. It is: 'Believe'. 'Believe' plus nothing. 'Believe in Jesus Christ.'

But we must not only believe, we must believe the truth, and the statement 'Jesus Christ, the object of our faith' is essential. —Because *faith* is only as good as its object. Everyone has faith. The atheist has faith. The question is, what is his or her faith 'in'? The object is essential. And so Paul states the object clearly: Christ is Savior because He is God and man. And as the God-man, He became our substitute and our sacrifice.

There are lots of Jesuses in the world. People knock on your door, or they ride their bicycles through your neighborhood, offering a different Jesus from the one described here and preached by the apostles. The 'Jesus' of the Mormons, or the 'Jesus' of the Jehovah's Witnesses is a kind of 'avatar'—a heavenly being, but not God, and not really essentially different from the angels. And the 'Jesus' of liberalism...he's not even that. He's simply a man—a 'good man', a 'great example', a 'great teacher'—but 'just a man'. Those are different 'Jesuses' from the Christ of the scriptures and the Jesus of the apostles.

So, faith must have the right object. A person must believe the right doctrine in order to believe in the right person. The Colossians had done that. And Paul was telling them not to move away from that truth, which they had originally '*received*'. Do not move away from the true message. Do not move away from this statement that he has given about 'Christ Jesus the Lord'. That's what they had originally '*received*'. 'Continue in it', Paul is telling them.

But it's more than that. When they 'believed', they '*received*' more than a creed; they '*received*' Him, for we have a living Savior. When we believe in Him, we have a personal relationship with Him. We are actually placed 'in Him.' So Paul says, "...walk in Him." That itself indicates a relationship. All through scripture, the life of God's people is described as a walk. You can even see that in the early chapters of Genesis, (5:24), where we read of Enoch: 'And "Enoch walked with God..." 300 years; 'and then God took him.' "**...walked with God...**" That's what we are to be doing. We are to "walk" with Christ. And here Paul says, (he gives instruction to), "...walk in Him,"; which means

live in and by the truth of Him; the truth about Him: And don't depart from that truth. But also, in this 'mystical' sense, (if we can use that word), the 'mystical union' that we have with Him, we are to live in Him. We're to walk in Him.

The mystery that Paul revealed in chapter one is Christ 'in you'. He is in us. He is in us through the Holy Spirit, and we are placed in Him. So He lives in us, we live in Him, just like branches live in a vine. —That's how Jesus described us and our relationship to Him in John, chapter 15, verse 5. We have been in some sense, some spiritual sense, (but some real sense), placed in Him and He is in us. We draw our vitality from Him and that produces growth in the branches; it produces growth in the believer. And that's here in what Paul is saying.

But 'a walk' also suggests progress and movement along a path toward a destination. He says, 'we hold firm to the truth we have in Christ, as we hold true to him, that we progress.' We progress in knowledge. We progress and mature in conduct. Now if the Colossians would do that, they would not only make progress in the faith and in their relationship with Christ, but they would also fortify themselves against the heresy that was there in their city; the heresy which they were dealing with. —As well as all of the error that they would face throughout their entire lives. So, this is the great defense: 'Walking in Christ, standing true to Him and growing in that relationship with Him.' And Paul explains that in verse seven; that by continuing in what they '*received*', in the truth that they '*received*', and in Christ in walking in Him, that gives stability and growth. And there's no greater preparation for life's challenges than that.

And every one of us will face life's challenges along the way. Some more than others. But we all face challenges. And this is the great preparation for that: "Walk in Him," he says, "...having been firmly rooted, *and now* being built up in Him..." (vs7). 'Built up in Christ.' Since Christians 'have been rooted firmly in Christ' at the moment of their conversion, they have an unshakable foundation. And based on that foundation, they can grow up and be built up in the faith and become stable in the faith and in life.

Paul was using two pictures to describe the Christian life in this verse. First, that of a tree; and then, that of a building. He probably had Psalm 1 in mind when he wrote

of the Colossians 'being firmly rooted', because that's the description of the person who is blessed or who is happy in that Psalm: He or she delights in the Word of God, meditates in it day and night so that "He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water..." (Ps 1:3). Such a person is stable, like a tree whose roots go down deep into the soil. Storms will come, but the tree can't be shaken because its roots are deep. Its foundation is solid. That's the person who delights in Christ. He or she is stable and grows.

A person can't grow if he isn't rooted in the truth, 'assured' and 'stable'. He's like a tumbleweed, not like a firmly rooted tree. If you've ever driven across the Texas panhandle, you've seen tumbleweeds. The wind blows them across the road. —They have no root in the ground. Now that's the person or the persons that Paul describes in Ephesians, chapter 4, in verse 14, when he calls them "children". And he doesn't speak of them approvingly with that word in that context. He speaks of them as being immature, as being children that are carried about by every wind of doctrine. They're not mature in their thinking, and they're not well grounded. They are easily shaken and easily taken-in by the latest spiritual fad and fashion, always drawn to something new, or something different. They're not like the tree of Psalm 1. They are spiritual tumbleweeds. No root in the truth, no firm grounding in the Word of God.

It's those who have been firmly rooted in Christ who are stable, who are confident in the truth; and because of that they can grow and develop. They are now "being built up in Him", in Christ, Paul says. So you've been 'rooted' and grounded; and that happens at the moment of faith. And because of that, you are being built up in Him.

That leads to the second picture that Paul presents here, —that of a building going up. That is, a healthy Christian is a 'work in progress.' We are always, in this life, a 'work in progress.' We have never and we will never arrive fully and completely in this world and in this life. We are constantly developing, growing. And that's what he describes here. It's like a building under construction. And a building is only as stable as its foundation. And I think Paul may have had illustrations of that by drawing upon all

that was around him while in prison—for Rome was filled with unstable structures; (and it had some very stable ones as well)

Caesar Augustus had expanded the empire and brought a great deal of glory to the city of Rome. Toward the end of his life he boasted, "I found the city of Rome a city of bricks and I left it a city of marble." Well, there were a lot of marble buildings there—but not all of them. A lot of buildings were made of cheap materials and built on very unstable ground. As a result, the city was constantly filled with the noise of buildings collapsing. This was one of the great fears of the population: people lived in constant worry/expectation of their tenements or their apartments collapsing, (and some of those buildings were five to ten stories high). They would fall on their heads or fall into the streets so there was this daily danger of being suddenly killed or injured. So, the foundation matters. Buildings with a firm foundation can be built tall and be reliable. And they stand and do not fall.

And so it is with the Christians. Those 'rooted in Christ are being built up'. And they can be built higher and greater. And that's what happens with us. As we are rooted in the truth, and we are living consistently with that truth, and we are studying that truth, we will grow in that truth, and grow greater and grow stronger.

Now Paul has mixed his metaphors here, 'Being rooted in Christ we have the stability of a solid foundation, like a foundation of granite.' But this is a different kind of foundation—this is a living foundation. We are in Christ; and we receive His life. But this life is nourished by the Word of God. We have the life of Christ in us. —And the way we develop that life is through the study of God's Word. It's like the water that feeds the tree by the stream in Psalm 1. Streams of water that that tree draws from. And that's what we do, through the study and the comprehension of God's revelation, through the study of scripture. It is the *means* of growth in the Christian life. Those who hold to that truth will grow in their knowledge of Christ, and in true doctrine, and will mature in the use of it. They will be wise. They will be people who increase in their discernment, and in their relationship with the Lord. They will grow closer to Him.

That's what Paul goes on to say. As they, (as we), are being built up, we are being established in our faith. We are continually being more firmly grounded in the basic truths of the Christian faith. We never grow out of what we received at the very beginning: The basics of Christianity; the fundamentals of the faith. We never go beyond them in the sense that we leave them behind, for we are always 'rooted' in them, and we grow deeper in our understanding of them, and our knowledge of them, our appreciation of them, and our assurance of the truth of them. We never grow out of the 'fundamentals' of knowing that Jesus Christ is how He is described here: As the man, (the Messiah); the one who is Lord, (the one who is God); the God-man; and our sacrifice. This is fundamental to the Christian life. This is fundamental truth. And we never grow away from that; we only grow deeper in our understanding of it and application of it.

We must be constantly looking to Him. We must be constantly knowing and growing in the fundamentals of the faith, the fundamentals of Christ Himself. He is, we could say, the 'North Star' of the Christian life. Ancient mariners, as you know, navigated the seas by looking at the North Star. It was a fixed point of reference. And they could know where they were in light of that.

Some years ago we were up in New England and we had gone up north to visit a national park. As we were coming back, I began to sense something's not right here. This doesn't look familiar—Am I going the right direction? And it was getting late. It was about five or so in the afternoon. Then I looked out to my left and I could see the sun setting. Well, if the sun is setting on my left, then I must be going north, and I need to be going south. So from the sun's position, I was able to navigate properly and get going in the right direction.

Well that's the idea. We have a fixed, or a constant sense of a 'standard' by which to gain our direction. And that's what Christ is. And that's what we must do—Focus on Him. It's what the author of Hebrews tells us to do in Hebrews, chapter 12, where it talks about 'the race of faith'—and he says how we run that race is by "...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith..." (vs2). We are to be constantly

looking to Him—constantly looking to the truth regarding Him. That's what we must do, because Christ keeps us in the right path as we walk through life; as we journey through this world: This hostile world in which we live. We need to be keeping our eyes on Him.

The result of this is given next; and the result is happiness; it's thanksgiving. We will be "...overflowing with gratitude." (vs7b), Paul says. Now this should characterize the Christian life—Thankfulness: For we have received everything. Now this is also true of everyone. Everyone in the world, believer or non-believer, has what they have by the grace and the goodness of God. The unbeliever just doesn't know it. Should know it. Doesn't know it. But you and I know it. And that should affect the way we live.

We have received everything. We have achieved nothing. Now what I mean by that is we didn't earn a thing. What we achieve is achieved by the grace of God, and by the application of our energies and our mind to the things of God. But ultimately it is the work of God in us. And I think you see that here in the statements that Paul has made. Notice all that Paul has said here is *passive*. Not active, it's *passive*; 'Having been firmly rooted, being built up, being established.' We didn't ground ourselves or build ourselves. This is what the Lord, by His grace, has and is doing for us.

Now we have responsibilities. We are responsible to be active in the faith: To study, to think, to pray, and to persevere. But God always takes the initiative, which is '*effective*', and results in our faith and actions. So there's nothing for us to boast in. All we can really do is thank Him. There's no better response than that, no more appropriate response than being grateful to God; being thankful; and being joyful in our thanksgiving.

Now we can tell a lot about ourselves by this very thing: Are we grateful for God's grace? Life gets difficult and life has pressures for all of us. And some, as I have mentioned before, go through greater difficulties than others. But all of us, regardless of our circumstances have the 'hope of glory'. This life is short and the trials of it will end: And we will be blessed greatly by our perseverance through it. Blessed in this life, but really blessed for all eternity. So the trials of this life are temporary for us and we have

much to be thankful for. We need to constantly keep our life in that perspective and be thankful and rejoice.

So, are we doing that? Are we grateful for God's grace? Are we a thankful people? Are we a joyful people? If not, maybe our minds have been set on the wrong thing. Maybe we're thinking about the wrong thing. It's so easy to get caught up in the world and get caught up in the daily routine of things so that we really take our minds off the things that we should be thinking about. When that happens life can become something of a grind for us instead of a joyful experience. We forget what we have. We forget who we are and what we're to be doing. We get into 'the grind'. And I can say that that's even true of a Bible teacher. Now to some extent, that's hard to avoid because we all have schedules; we have deadlines; we have things that we must get done. 'We' have a sermon to preach and must get to our desk to study the things that are necessary to produce it and be able to present it. —Get up early. —Stay up late. —Whatever it takes; that is part of the process. That's my life.

But you have the same thing in various other ways. We all find ourselves sometimes overwhelmed by circumstances and find ourselves in 'the grind'. This is, I think to some extent perhaps unavoidable, but we need to keep in mind that we need to be thinking about the things of God. Beware of grinding; of getting into a routine and forgetting what's important, —forgetting the things of the Lord.

Paul will deal with this in our next chapter when he tells us in chapter three, "Set your mind on the things above." This is how we're to live. Now this takes discipline, but this is how you and I are to live our lives. Not thinking about the things below, not keeping our mind on all the details of this life. Yes, we've got to live an orderly and disciplined life. 'But keep your mind on the things above'; on the things of God and His grace: Things like the 'hope of glory' which he spoke of in chapter 1, verse 27. Keep your eyes on the 'North Star' of Christ Jesus. Joy and thankfulness are the spontaneous response of walking in the truth and walking with the Lord. They are the natural response of fellowship with Christ who is in us.

Now this is the most effective defense against error. Those who know the truth, who hold to it and walk with Christ, know the real thing. And they will not be taken in by error, by counterfeit 'Christs', or counterfeit gospels. That's the positive part of Paul's instruction here—Walk in Him. The negative part: 'Don't get captured on the way. Don't get away from Christ'. That's what Paul says next in verses eight through ten. "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception..."

Now I don't think Paul was necessarily condemning philosophy here. Philosophy is the love of wisdom—That's good. In fact, Paul even quotes philosophers in a few places, (three places that I can think of). I don't think Paul was enamored of philosophy or was promoting philosophy in any sense, but what he's doing here is opposing this false teaching (that had come to Colossae), that was dressed up in 'philosophical language'. It sounded authoritative but was only human speculation —and empty.

We gather from what Paul says about it that it was largely Jewish teaching, taken from the Law with its restrictions on diet and promotion of various rules. But it was also evidently mixed with Greek ideas. The commentators often identify the heresy that had come to Colossae as Gnosticism. Gnosticism really didn't become full blown until the second century. So sometimes they speak of 'proto-Gnosticism', the forerunner to full-blown Gnosticism. This is probably the general sense of what this teaching was that had come to the city.

The name, Gnosticism, (I probably have talked about this earlier in our studies), is taken from the Greek word 'Gnosis', which means 'knowledge'. And the Gnostics claimed to have 'secret knowledge' that no one else had. They had the 'mystics' that would enable people to become spiritual and mature and maneuver through the difficulties of this world, and through the difficulties 'out in the other world' that we would have to maneuver past to get to God. So it was a mystical kind of thing, but also a combination of Greek philosophy and, in some cases, Christianity.

This is what the church father Tertullian dealt with. Tertullian was a brilliant lawyer of the second and third centuries who defended the faith against Gnosticism. And he asked, "What, indeed, has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" In other words, 'what

unity can there possibly be between human philosophy and divine revelation? What harmony can there be between the city where philosophy was born and the city where the Psalms were sung; between Plato and Paul; between the church and the world? What harmony is there between them? —None! Gnosticism mixed them together—and the process diluted and destroyed the gospel with that mix.

Now it's really not altogether clear what the false teachers taught. There is speculation but what is clear is what they denied: They denied the Deity of Christ; They denied the sufficiency of Christ and His sacrifice; And they dishonored Christ, (not explicitly, but implicitly they did). Paul rejected all of that. He called it "...empty deception, according to the tradition of men...", and 'not according to divine revelation'. It is "...according," he said, "to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." (vs8).

Now that indicates something important about this heresy: That it was very Jewish and legalistic in its bent and its substance. Because that word, "*elementary*", refers to the rudiments, the basics, the 'A, B, Cs', of something. Paul used this expression, "the elementary principles", in Galatians, chapter four in reference to the 'Law' and its rules and regulations, (which is basic to 'religion'). The 'Law' is a necessary part of religion, not to gain or promote righteousness, because we cannot gain righteousness through the Law, but to give and show to us the 'standard' of righteousness; the 'standard' of God's character: In order to show us how far short we fall of it. But when the 'Law' is taught as a *means* of righteousness and a *means* of attaining acceptance with God, then it is false. And that was part of this heresy. It was promoting a 'works salvation', a 'rules-based religion', which is enslaving and always results in failure and hypocrisy. That is not "according to Christ", Paul says.

False teachers spoke of Christ. And no doubt they spoke well of Christ: 'He's a great teacher.' 'He's very important.' 'We need Christ—but we need more than Christ; Christ alone is inadequate.' That's not the Christ Paul knew and that the Colossians '*received*'; for He is sufficient for salvation and for all things.

But false teachers are clever. They use biblical words. They appear as light. They appear to be servants of Christ; speak of Him; speak well of Him; speak as though they are true Christians. In fact, though, this is the description that Paul gives of the false teachers, 'the ministers of Satan', in II Corinthians 11, verse 15. He says they 'disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.' They're not servants of righteousness, but that's the disguise that they use. And that's what makes them effective and makes them seductive.

J Gresham Machen warned of that in his book, *Christianity and Liberalism*. I've referred to this book more than once—and I do so because it's a classic. It's as valuable today as the day it was written and published in 1927. And it's an excellent exposure of liberal theology. He was very keen and knowledgeable of liberal theology because he was almost captured by it. When he was a student at Princeton Seminary, he went to Germany for a year and studied under one of the leading liberals of the day, Wilhelm Herrmann. He was captivated by his lectures and it wasn't so much the intellectual argument that he gave (in fact Machen described Herrmann as being illogical), but the force of his fervent, religious spirit—that's what captivated Machen. He described Herrmann as 'alive' ... that was the word he used ... as having a 'deeper devotion' to Christ than anything that he knew himself. "He is a wonderful man", he wrote in one of his letters to home. He was almost 'captured'.

Later he came to see that 'the Christ' to whom Herrmann was so fervently devoted never really existed. This teacher elevated 'religious experience' over 'belief in the Bible'. It wasn't the Christ of the Bible that Herrmann was devoted to, but to a 'christ' of his own imagination that was not grounded in the Word of God. Often, it's not the error of the cults that attracts people but their enthusiasm. They seem alive. Or it's the community that they have. It seems real and warm—and they promote good things. They promote virtues, family values, hard work, patriotism. But they all have a very different 'christ', and a very different way of salvation. It is not the Christ of the apostles and prophets and it's not the way of grace. It's not the way of faith alone in Christ alone— but the way of 'works' or 'ceremonies.'

Christianity is Christ, who He is and what He's done. Now experiences, feelings, enthusiasms are important and has its place. It's all very good when it comes naturally from a knowledge of the truth. But by itself it is not The Truth; and it is not the standard of The Truth. No, the 'standard of Truth' is Scripture! "What think ye of Christ?" —That was the question Jesus put to the Pharisees in Matthew 22, verse 42. "What think ye of Christ?" That is the important question. And it can only be answered from the Bible.

Paul told the Thessalonians, "...examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good..." (1Th 5:21). We examine and test teaching, doctrine, and practice by Scripture. It is our authority. It alone is our authority. If you can't handle scripture, if you don't know the Bible well, feelings and the force of a person's personality may overwhelm you. —And he or she may take you captive. It's those who know the truth, who hold to it, and walk with Christ, walk in Christ, —it is they who know the real thing and will not be taken in by error.

And in verse nine, Paul explains why it is that we can trust in Christ fully and walk 'in Him'. It's because "...in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form..." In other words, Christ is God incarnate. God who became man with a real body and a genuine soul. There is nothing lacking in Him. He is fully God and fully man, the Son of God, and second person of the Trinity. That's what Scripture teaches. It's what Paul taught specifically in chapter one and it is truth.

Why would anyone be attracted to anything or anyone other than Him? Why? —I ask that because He is sufficient. That's what Paul is saying. And we are in Him. As believers we are in Him. That's all we need. —And that's what Paul says next in verse ten: "...and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority." The New International Version translates that a little more literally, "...and you have been given fullness in Christ...." It means 'made complete', but the word that Paul uses here is, 'made full'. Paul seems to have chosen to state it in this way because this word '**fullness**', (which he used also in verse 9a), was probably a 'buzzword' of the false teachers. 'They' were teaching that while Jesus is good, and Jesus is necessary, He's not enough, —that 'they' had what would make people 'complete'; that 'they'

would 'fill up' what was lacking 'in Christ'. They would make a person fit for all of the challenges in the world and all of the evil angels and evil powers that one would face.

The Roman Catholic church might make a similar claim: 'We believe in Christ. We believe in the Trinity.' And so they do: They have sound, solid doctrines in those areas. But they also would tell you, 'Christ is not enough. We have what will make you complete. We have the sacraments, the mass, and baptism. We have 'mediators' with God—the Pope and the priests here on Earth; Mary, and the saints in heaven. In fact, we have the 'Treasury of Merit', (all the grace that was accumulated by the great works of the great saints), and it's accumulated there in this 'Treasury in Heaven'... and you can draw upon that'... and so on.

Paul would say two things. 'That's not biblical. Those are traditions of men.' And second: 'Christ is sufficient'. The fullness is in Him. He has conquered sin, and all of the hostile, spiritual angelic forces. He has overcome it all. That's biblical. Don't go outside of it. Stick with scripture. That is our best defense against error. Walk in Christ. He is your life. Those who do, will never get captured. The Comanches are out there—and far worse. But we have a fort; a mighty fortress. —It is Christ. We are to walk in Him, to believe in Him, to live in Him, to stay in the truth of Him. We do that through faith in the Gospel, and fidelity to His Word: —Perseverance.

Every believer has been put in Christ by sovereign grace. We have been firmly 'rooted' in Him, and we are presently being 'built up' in Him. His life is in us. And we can never be taken out of Him. But we are responsible, again, to persevere. God enables the believer to do that. And the believer will do that. But nothing will give us the motivation to be faithful more than walking with Him, —than personal devotion to Him, —that leads to obedience...And knowing Him, personally.

Remember Mark 14? We finished Mark just two months ago: Jesus and His disciples were in Bethany in the home of Simon and Mary anointed the Lord with costly perfume. All of the disciples rebuked her: "What a waste!", they said. But Jesus took up for her: "But Jesus said, Let her alone...She has done a good deed to Me." (vs6). A few days later, one of those disciples betrayed Christ. One of those disciples denied

Him—denied Him three times. And all of them deserted Him. Mary stayed faithful. She was brave and true because she was devoted. She loved the Lord because she knew Him. And she seemed to have known more about Him than they did. The more we know, the more closely we will walk with Him—the more we will love Him; naturally.

So Tertullian asked, "What, indeed, has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" What did the philosophers offer us that is better than what the apostles and the prophets offer? — Nothing! The Word of God offers "Christ Jesus the Lord". He is all sufficient. And we have Him through faith alone. If you've not received Him, do so; and as Paul says, "Walk in Him"; if you do you will never go astray.

So as we close, if you have not come to know Him, as we have, then we invite you to receive Him, —to 'believe' in Him, Christ Jesus the Lord. He is God the Son... He created all things... And He holds all things together. —What can be more sufficient than that?! Plus, He is the only Savior of sinners. He redeems us from sin and guilt. All who believe in Him are forgiven forever. They are made sons and daughters of God with a glorious future, and an absolutely secure present. May God help you to trust in Him, for He will never disappoint you.

Let's pray.

Father, what a great truth it is to know that regardless of how it ends for us, whether our life ends in death, or He comes—we have that hope that He is coming. And we have the hope of heaven, we have the 'hope of glory,' as Paul describes it. And it's all because of Your Son, and the price that He paid for us. We give You thanks for that. May we walk in Him, walk with devotion and increase in our knowledge and love for Him.

We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

*(End of Audio)*