

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
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An Established Community

Colossians 2:1-10

Key verse: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

We tend to think that our struggles and challenges are entirely different from those of our first century ancestors. Yet, as I read the New Testament, I am so often impressed with how similar are our struggles to the ones faced by believers of that earlier period.

In this text, Colossians 2:1-10, Paul addresses two basic needs of the believers at Colosse—and of us today. Paul wants to help the Colossians with (1) how to live and (2) how to believe.

1. How to live. Paul wants to help strengthen and establish the Colossians, so that they can live victorious lives in Christ. He wants their hearts to be “encouraged and united in love” (v. 2).

Encouragement is something everyone needs—in frequent and large doses! So, Paul writes to encourage these believers in their faith. Mother Teresa said, “Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier.” Paul’s purpose was to encourage others. Let’s make that our purpose as well.

Another purpose for Paul’s writing was to help those believers be “united in love” (v. 2). Every church should make this a priority.

Redwood trees sometimes grow as tall as 250-300 feet. But they have very shallow root systems. When storms blow, you might expect redwoods to topple over easily, but that’s not the case. Even though their root systems are shallow, they are intertwined with the root structures of the other redwood trees. Each tree is strengthened, and helped to stand strong, by its connection with the other trees.

The church works that way. When we are united in love—intertwined with each other—we find remarkable strength in our life together.

Concerning victorious Christian living, Paul also writes: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith....” (vv. 6-7).

What does it mean to be “rooted” in Christ? Just as a tall tree sends its roots deep into the soil and draws nourishment to grow and thrive, so the Christian is to be deeply rooted in Christ, who is the source of our life and strength.

To be “built up” in Christ involves a different metaphor. Just as a house stands strong when built on a firm foundation, so a Christian’s life stands strong through life’s storms when built on the strong foundation of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

“Encouraged,” “united in love,” “rooted” and “built up” in Christ—these are the ingredients of victorious Christian living. But Paul writes with a concern, not only for *how to live*, but also *how to believe*.

2. How to believe. The Colossian church was under attack by false teachers. Though Paul’s letter never explicitly names or describes these false teachings, most believe they involved some early form of the Gnostic heresy. In the passage we are exploring now, Colossians 2:1-10, Paul addresses at least three components of this false teaching: *secret knowledge*, *reliance on human wisdom and tradition*, and *minimizing Christ*.

Secret knowledge. Gnosticism taught that people must struggle up a long, difficult ladder to get to God. In order to make the climb, people needed all kinds of secret spiritual knowledge and hidden spiritual passwords.

Paul has this false teaching in mind when he sets forth Christ “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (v. 3). Paul is saying, “You Gnostics have your wisdom, shut off, hidden, barred from ordinary people.... We too have our knowledge, but that knowledge of ours is not hidden in unintelligible books; it is hidden in Christ; and therefore it is open to all men everywhere. The truth of Christianity is not a secret which is hidden. It is a secret which is revealed”! (William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series*)

Reliance on human wisdom and tradition. Addressing this false teaching, Paul challenges the Colossian Christians: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ” (v. 8).

Minimizing Christ. The false teachers minimized the person and work of Jesus Christ. They denied his deity, and they taught that faith in Christ was inadequate for salvation. To this false teaching, Paul lifts up Jesus Christ as the one in whom “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” and the one in whom all may find “fullness” or completeness (vv. 9-10).

These two verses, 9 and 10, are significant because in them Paul summarizes the key to both *how to live* victoriously and *how to believe* rightly. Both are found not in a philosophy but in a person, the person of Jesus Christ.

In regard to right belief, you will find that most heresies or false beliefs can be detected by what they teach about *who Jesus is*. Usually, a false belief will deny either the humanity of Jesus or, more often, the deity of Jesus. So, Paul affirms both the full humanity and the full deity of Christ when he writes, “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (v. 9). The early church eventually came to proclaim this truth by saying of Jesus, he is both “fully God and fully man.”

In regard to how to live victoriously in Christ, Paul proclaims that we can “come to fullness in him” (v. 10). *Christ is the fullness that fills our emptiness!*

Every generation has its cultural voices promising to fill the empty place in the hearts of people. In Colosse, those voices included the false teachings of Gnosticism. In our day, the voices include the voices of hedonism (“If it feels good, do it”) and materialism (I am fulfilled by what I buy and consume) and many other voices. The Gospel proclaims that our empty hearts are filled through an experiential relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the fullness that fills our emptiness.

When you have a relationship with Christ, you are complete in Him. Think about it: If you know Jesus, you have a friend who will be with you always. If you know Jesus, God’s Spirit lives inside you—guiding you, strengthening you, and giving you power for living. If you know Jesus, you have the assurance that you will have life after this short earthly life ends—life that goes on forever. If you know Jesus, you have all you need. In Christ you have all the “fullness” of God.

Thanks be to God!

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