

Colossians 2:6-8

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Paul encourages the believers to remember and stand firm in their established faith. The deceptions of the world can easily distract us from the true path.

The believers in Colossae have exhibited “good discipline” and “stability” (Colossians 2:4-5). With that established foundation, which is in alignment with Paul’s praise for their faith in Chapter 1, Paul now moves to one of the main purposes of his letter. He wants to exhort the Colossians to stay on the right path.

He says, *therefore* (meaning because you have this foundation of good discipline and stability), *as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him*. Much of Paul’s writings to the various churches are making this very same plea: you have believed in *Jesus*, now continue to *walk in Him*; to live in accordance with Him, that you might gain the tremendous benefits thereof.

The Colossians have *received Christ Jesus the Lord*. In Chapter 1, verse 8, Paul says that he has heard a report from Epaphras about the faith of the Colossians. Paul did not start the church in Colossae, nor has he ever visited it. He is writing from prison in Rome, where he is suffering for his testimony for Christ. But he has heard the report of the Colossians’ faith. Paul has spent most of the letter, so far, talking about the beauty and abundance of Jesus Christ, and the benefit of aligning our hearts with him. The Colossians have heard and have received this message. Paul has reminded them of the vast riches of this foundation.

Now, he is going to begin addressing some of the pressures the Colossian believers are facing. He sets the table with a call to consistency. *Walk in Him* whom you have *received*. In other words, don’t abandon the path you are on for a different way. You have *received* (or accepted) *Christ as the Lord*. Now, put that into action. Live as you believe. The Colossians have a new birth and are God’s children. God will always be their inheritance (Romans 8:17a). However, they must make good choices in faith in order to gain the full rewards available to them (Colossians 3:23-24; Romans 8:17b).

To reinforce this, Paul says next: *having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith*. Once again, Paul is showing the need, power, and potential for alignment. The Colossians *have been firmly rooted* in Christ, meaning they dug in and cemented their hope and allegiance to Jesus as Lord. The soil has been tilled, the seeds planted, and the roots taken hold.

Now, they are *being built up in him*. The plant is growing. It takes in nutrients and develops in accordance with the root system. They are also being *established in their faith*. The Greek word translated *established* here is “bebaioo,” which can also be translated “confirm.” A confirmation is a reiteration of what has already been introduced. So, in essence Paul is saying the Colossians believers are being reinforced by their faith.

There is a set of dual pillars operating here. Both are built on the foundation (root) of Christ and the decision of the believers to align with him (*faith*). The first pillar is that their faith is developing, growing, and *building* toward greater capacities, understanding, and rewards (the “wealth” mentioned in Colossians 2:2).

The second pillar is a continuous reinforcement of their *faith*. It proves itself as it grows. It is confirmed, or established, as it is practiced. So far as the Colossians continue to live in alignment with the *root* that was *firmly* embedded in their lives, they will continue to see it established (or confirmed) with fruit.

This is not a brand-new idea. Paul adds here, *as you were instructed*. Much of Paul’s letter to the Colossians is a call to remembrance. Do not abandon the way. Do not be led astray. You have been told about this. You have believed this. Now, *walk* consistently. Live consistently. Paul said something similar in the theme statement of his letter to the church in Rome, concluding that “The righteous man shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17b). Believers are made righteous in the sight of God through Christ’s death, every sin having been nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). But to enjoy the experience of our new birth requires us to walk as *instructed*, believing that God’s way is for our best. “Righteousness” can be thought of as walking in harmony with our design, leading to our fulfillment.

Paul concludes this exhortation with, *and overflowing with thankfulness*. The diligence and hard work of making daily choices in alignment with the gospel can sometimes make it seem like a burden or an obligation. This is why Paul spends so much time talking about the incredible reality of Christ, the benefit of living in accordance with Him, and the amazing opportunity of faith. It is such a privilege to have access to this opportunity. Believers ought to feel a sense of awe as we work through this life of faith. When we see things truly, *thankfulness* should be *overflowing*. It should not be viewed as a burden to do what is in our best interest.

The Greek word translated *overflow* is “perisseuo.” It means “abound” or “exceed.” Gratitude ought to be such a staple of this life of faith that it exceeds measure. It ought to be a reach that exceeds our grasp. When we see ourselves for what we are, as creatures, and Christ for who He is, as the creator, and realize that Christ is in us, we ought to be astounded (Colossians 1:27). When this reality is believed and embraced, the Colossians should be thankful for the opportunity, in suffering, in mystery, in revelation, in doing, in understanding, and everything else in between. It ought to flow to every part of a believer and spill out of us in abundance.

Having established where they are, Paul starts to warn against where they could be going. The context of Colossians makes it reasonable to assume that Epaphras, when he visited Paul and reported on the church in Colossae, has told the apostle about the alternative paths that are presenting themselves. Paul warns against any path that is not the gospel, is not in alignment with who Christ is, and conflicts with the foundational faith of the Colossian believers.

From what we know of the early church, and from what Paul says as this letter progresses, there are two competing voices/narratives for the early Colossians.

The first competing voice is the Greek system of *philosophy*. Colossae was a Roman province inundated with the Greek system of thought. This includes the polytheism of the pantheon, which Rome adopted from Greece. To follow this path is to embrace the exploitative and self-destructive path of paganism. It leads to *empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world.*

The second competing avenue that may have been present is the controversy surrounding whether or not Gentile believers needed to be circumcised (in effect, “become” Jews) as part of their commitment to Christ. To follow this path leads to the self-rationalizing pit of legalism. This is according to the *tradition of men* rather than according to the spirit of God.

Paul warns, *see to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception.* There are alternative options to the way of Christ. Believers must be steadfast in choosing the way of Christ, every day, in every decision. A foundation of faith (which the Colossians are lauded for) does not eliminate the temptation of another way. We have to be diligent about choosing faith continuously.

So, this is a warning. *See to it.* It is a call to action, to be on guard. It is a command to stewardship. There is no one to blame from being taken in other than ourselves. We must ensure that we choose a perspective that is true, and make choices that are in our true interest. Do not follow competing philosophies that only lead to destructive consequences.

The Greek word translated *philosophy* here is the Greek word “*philosophia*.” This is the only place it is used in Scripture. “*Philosophia*” is literally translated as “love of wisdom.” It is used in Greek writings for zeal or skill in any art or science, any branch of knowledge. This, of course, is not true wisdom, but the world’s rationalized attempt at wisdom.

Here Paul is using the term *philosophy* in clear reference to the Greek worldview, one in which the intellect of man is capable of the highest reaches, apart from the true God. And the gods are aides to that end. These gods can sometimes be manipulated, and sometimes arbitrarily determine our fate. Both lead to futility.

Paul partners his warning against these Greek philosophies with *empty deception*. A way of life that is void, that does not provide what it promises. It is a deceit, all talk but no sustenance. This could be a further warning against the Greek mindset. It could also be Paul’s way of bringing in the Gentile/Jew controversy. His key point is to not be *deceived* by anything. Do not be led astray by the idea that you need anything other than faith in Christ, and to follow His ways. This applies both to the intellectual mountaintop the Greeks say is key, as well as the circumcision some Jews say is necessary to gain righteousness, apart from faith (Romans 9:30-31; Colossians 2:11).

These *empty deceit(s)* are *according to the tradition of men*. Meaning, they depend on human reasoning. They make the mind of a man the deity rather than the Person of Christ. The Greek mindset is idolatry because it places things (human reasoning and controllable gods) in place of Christ, who is the true head of existence.

Further, any demand that Gentiles be circumcised is foolishness because it is just a physical act based on the long-standing tradition of the Jewish people (Colossians 2:11). The real key is the heart, and walking by faith, not these *traditions* that mankind has elevated to more prominence than they deserve.

Further, *the tradition of men*, is according to the *elementary principles of this world rather than on Christ*. Paul is using the phrase *elementary principles* the way we might use the word superficial. Circumcision is a matter of the physical body. What truly matters is the spiritual realm which is accessed through faith. The true treasure of life is spiritual, rather than material (Colossians 2:2-3). Human reason is ostensibly about comprehending the knowable. However, when it comes to understanding life's purpose and meaning, human reason pretends to comprehend that which it cannot fathom, leading to futility (Ecclesiastes 2:11). Faith is about partnering with the unknowable, participating in something greater than ourselves. We can gain true knowledge of the world we see only when we first gain spiritual knowledge through faith (Colossians 2:3; Ecclesiastes 12:13).

When the physical senses and the mental capacity of man is our highest ideal, we inevitably will stop far short of abundant life. Solomon asserts that this path leads to futility, folly, and madness (Ecclesiastes 1:17). When we rely on self, we leave so much on the table, so to speak. But Christ allows us to reach beyond the *elementary principles* of the world, and into the deeper ones that lead to true fulfillment in life. This is consistent with Ecclesiastes as well, where Solomon insists that a life rooted in faith leads to wisdom and joy (Ecclesiastes 5:18.)

Faith to follow the way of Christ shows us a path beyond *the elementary principles of this world* and into the spiritual realities of the heavenly realm, This leads to the greatest treasures available in life. This is the path to gain the reward of the inheritance of the Kingdom of God (Colossians 3:23-24).

There are two paths one must choose when making choices in our daily walk. The first option is based on Christ. It starts with Him, centers around Him, and depends on Him. The other alternative we can choose is based on anything else (Scripture often uses "the world" or "the kingdom of the world" as a juxtaposition to The Kingdom of God, which centers on Christ, its king).

In this section, Paul is imploring the Colossians to continue to walk in alignment with the path they have chosen, as has been taught to them by other believers, through faith in Christ. This is the path that leads to a true and lasting benefit that is rooted in the spiritual dimension. And he warns them to be on guard and to not be persuaded by the alternative path, which leads to adverse consequences, both in this life as well as the life to come.

The Colossian believers are to recognize the reality of these opposing positions (Christ and the world), and not allow the world to take them *captive*. Rather, they are to live *according to Christ*, following His ways.

Biblical Text

⁶Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk in Him, ⁷ 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.

⁸See 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.