



SESSION OBJECTIVE: COLOSSIANS 2:6-8

To understand how being rooted in Christ protects us from false teaching.

Taken

In 2008, Liam Neeson starred in the action film *Taken*, a movie about a former government operative trying to track down and rescue his kidnapped daughter. Despite mixed reviews, it grossed more than 226 million dollars and transformed Neeson's career. In the movie, the daughter is unsuspectingly taken captive by traffickers, and held against her will. It takes a lot of fighting before she is finally freed at the end (Spoiler: This movie is 12 years old).

Colossians 2:8 says, "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." False teaching has a way of taking captive believers, and it is a fight to regain the ground of truth. This is why Paul commands the Colossian believers, "Just as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Col. 2:6). Being rooted, built up, and established in the Lord helps protect against such a sordid fate (Col. 2:7). This week we will look at what being rooted in Christ means, and what majestic work the cross of Christ completed for us.

Rooted

Verses 6 and 7 are a command, not an encouragement. When Paul says, "so walk in Him," in verse 6, it is in the imperative mood in the original language. The imperative mood indicates a command is being given.

Walking in Christ, or living with Christ Jesus as the Lord over your life, entails at least three things that Paul mentions here.

FIRMLY ROOTED

The first phrase Paul uses is one that has an agricultural flare to it. Being, “firmly rooted,” imagines the faith of someone, as the roots of a tree sinking deep into the soil of Christian truth. When a tree is planted and the roots take hold, the tree is not easily moved. It can withstand wind, rain, and any other natural element. The believer who receives Christ and brings everything in their life under His Lordship is like a firmly planted tree, unshakeable in almost every way.

BUILT UP IN HIM

This second phrase carries an almost construction-like imagery. Much of the New Testament deals with the idea of having a firm foundation upon which a structure is built. Jesus talks about the wise man and the foolish man who build their houses on the rock and the sand in Matthew 7:24-27. Paul talks about being, “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone” (Eph. 2:20). Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:11, “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Being *under* the Lordship of Christ means building your life *upon* Him.

ESTABLISHED IN YOUR FAITH

The third phrase is, “established or strengthened in your faith.” It speaks to the continuing nature of the quality of the faith in Colossae. Not only is it firmly rooted like a tree, and laid upon the foundation of Jesus, but like a muscle that is being exercised, it continues to get stronger and bigger. Living under the Lordship of Jesus is a self-confirming process. The more you act in faith, the easier it becomes to act in faith, which in turn leads you to further act in faith. You could say, “The more you do it, the more you do it.”

Protect Yourself

Paul then moves to discuss why it is so important to be rooted in Christ in verse 8: “See 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 uses the word, “captive,” the Greek word *συλαγωγέω* (*sylogōgeō*), which means, “to carry off as prey or booty.” It imagines false teaching or false teachers as predators seeking to kidnap Christians. The language also insinuates that this is not accidental. Bad theology propagated by false teachers is almost always a planned attack against truth. With that in mind, one should be on the alert always, hence the Scripture’s appeal to have a sober mind (1 Pet. 5:8). Of course, the difficulty of such an action is increased greatly when the believer is deeply rooted into Christian truth. What is it, though, that carries away Christians? Below is a brief outline.

PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy here is connected by a single article to the term, “empty deceit,” and thus grammatically speaking, Paul is connecting these two thoughts together. In other words, philosophy is in the same vein of empty deceit. Given the Greco-Roman cultural backdrop, philosophy here is almost certainly a Hellenistic type of philosophy bent toward the likes of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates. Paul calls these things, “hollow,” or “empty,” depending on the translation. While it is not explicit here or anywhere else in the New Testament (this is the only time the word *philosophy* is used), it was clearly a destructive channel for heresy to spread. Perhaps it was a mingling of philosophy with the Christian Gospel that Paul addressed. Given the high amount of Gentiles in the Colossian church and their propensity toward Greek culture and philosophy, it might be that many of them were unwilling to let go of their previous philosophies as they entered into the church, and some false teachers saw that as an opportunity to tear down the truth of God.

There are then three descriptions of this empty, hollow philosophy that Paul gives. Below is an outline of these terms.

HUMAN TRADITION

The idea of tradition itself is not an inherently wrong one. Paul uses this same word in other places and it's not used negatively. It's the Greek word παράδοσις (paradosis), and it means, "delivery, handing over, transmission." The issue for Paul is that this philosophy that had invaded the Gospel was just that: the transmission of *human* ideas. Human ideas or ideologies have no place within divine revelation.

ELEMENTAL SPIRITS

The second term he uses to describe this destructive philosophy is, "elemental," or even, "elementary." The word used here is a word that means, "basic components," and thus the idea of, "elementary" translates well since elementary ideas are considered basic building blocks of bigger ideas. The history of interpretation on this term is vast, but Paul likely meant the more Jewish way of using it. Jewish teaching considered the elemental spirits to be supernatural beings, most likely demons. The inference here is that worldly philosophy has been tainted by demonic influence.

NOT ACCORDING TO CHRIST

It shouldn't come as a surprise, but just to be totally clear, Paul dictates that this philosophy is distinctly non-Christian. This is the thrust of Paul's argument. You have likely heard people rightly say: "All truth is God's truth." That reality helps us negotiate what we listen to and what we reject. However, anything that is opposed to Christ is of no value for Christians for discipleship. Part of knowing what sound doctrine means is knowing what to reject.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Colossians 2:6. In your own words, what does it mean to walk in Christ?

2. Read Colossians 2:7. What does it mean to be rooted in Christ? What do you imagine when you think about being rooted in Him?

Day Two

1. Read Psalm 1:1-4. How does this Psalm describe the blessed man? How does it describe the evil man? How does this verse shape the way you view Psalm 2:7?

2. Read Colossians 2:7. What does it mean to be, "built up in Him?" What kind of imagery do you imagine when you think about this phrase?

Day Three

1. Read Matthew 7:24-27. Who is like the wise man, according to Jesus? What does Jesus say the wise man will build his house on? What does the fool build his house on? How does this verse correlate with being, “built up in Him?”

2. Read Colossians 2:8. What does Paul warn the believers in Colossae against? What are they at risk of being taken captive by?

Day Four

1. Read Colossians 2:8. How is this philosophy described? Write down all of the descriptive words.

2. Read Colossians 2:8. What does it mean that this philosophy is specifically, “not according to Christ?” Are non-Christian sources ever capable of true wisdom?

Week 6 Discussion: Swept Away

In Colossians 2:6-8, Paul warns the believers in Colossae of the growing threat of false teaching. In verse 8 he writes, “See to it that no one takes you captive.” The imminent threat of heresy was high enough for Paul to use such strong language. Today, we are in no less danger. Talk as a group about the different avenues through which we come in contact with false teaching, and how important it is to be rooted in Christ to protect ourselves from it.

1. Icebreaker: When you think about false teaching, what immediately comes to mind?
2. How is false teaching primarily transmitted today?
3. Can politics be an avenue through which false teaching is transmitted? In other words, is it possible for a Christian to develop ideas from political avenues that are counter to Scripture? Why or why not?
4. Do you ever appeal to any source outside of the Bible when defending your thoughts and actions? If so, what sources are they?
5. What are you doing to continually be rooted in Christ? What steps are you taking toward discipleship? Are you doing discipleship with anyone else? Why or why not?

Takeaways:

1. False teaching posed a threat in Colossae, and it still poses a threat today in the church.
2. One way to protect yourself from false teaching is to be rooted in Christ.