

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Rooted in Christ: Doctrine That Passes the Test" (Colossians 2:7)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/27/2011

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## **Introduction**

In our study of Colossians chapter two, we have come to the place where we are considering this issue: As individual Christians, and as the church of Jesus Christ, we need to restore and maintain a solid battle front against Satan's triple threats to the church.

Satan is always active in his effort to lead individual Christians, and the church as a body, away from the truth and into worldly philosophy, into legalism, and into man-made doctrines. This is how Satan undermines and destroys churches. This is how Satan undermines individual Christians. This is how Satan seeks to rob God's people of the things that rightfully belong to them, because of faith in Jesus Christ.

The question is: How are we to erect and maintain a solid battle front against these threats? How are we to do it? As we begin today I want to read for you once again the passage where we find the answer to this question. I'm reading from Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse five. And here the Apostle Paul, by his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ, and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is instructing the church. Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse five:

Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,

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rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

Now we have been taking note of the fact that in these verses the Apostle Paul tells believers that we need to maintain a united battle front against these threats. Maintain "good order and steadfastness," he says. He uses military language. That is the nature of these terms in the original language. "Good order." "Steadfastness." Take your battle positions. Man your posts. Stay in your ranks. That is the thrust of what he is saying. Erect and maintain a united battle front against the enemy.

The enemy will come. The enemy will attack. You can count on it. And as we have seen, in the visible church of our time, the battle front has largely broken down. The enemy is well within the gates. We need to put the enemy out, and we need to re-establish the strong battle front.

Not only does Paul tell us that we *need* to do this, he tells us *how* to do it. And there is only one way to do it. We have seen that this involves four imperatives that we find in the passage that I just read for you:

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First, we must walk an enlightened walk – verse six: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.”

Second, we must grow upon a firm foundation – verse 7: “rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

Third, we must trust in a complete Savior – verse 9: “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”

And fourth, we must rest in a complete salvation – verse 10: “and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”

### **Rooted and Built Up**

Now at the moment we are focusing on the second point: We must grow upon a firm foundation. Verse seven tells us that we must be “rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

Now, as we have been focusing on this second point, we have seen several important things:

First, we saw that the believer who is growing on a firm foundation puts down strong roots in sound doctrine, the doctrine of Christ, in order that the believer may grow upward in Christ. We saw that Paul uses two metaphors in this verse,

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two word-pictures: that of a tree putting down strong roots, and that of a building being erected upon a firm foundation.

Secondly, we saw that the believer who is growing on a firm foundation possesses stability in the truth. You can tell the true nature of the roots of a tree when strong winds blow. And you can tell the true nature of the roots of a person who professes to know Christ, when the winds of apostasy blow through the church. The individual who is rooted in Christ stands firm. The individual or the church that is not rooted in Christ topples and falls.

### **Sound Doctrine: The Preacher's Mission**

Today, we come to a third point, and it is this: The believer who is growing on a firm foundation is constantly taking in the nourishment of sound teaching. Sound doctrine. As we consider this point, we need to ask questions. One of the best things you can do as you read the Word of God is to ask questions. Ask questions of the text. What is this saying? What does this mean? How did it apply to the people to whom it was written? How does it apply to me? And in this particular case, that leads us to these three questions: What is sound teaching? Where do you find it? How can you be sure of it?

In answering these questions, I want to remind you of a passage we have looked at before – Second Timothy chapter four, beginning at verse one. Paul tells Timothy,

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I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables [to human myths rather than the reality of God's truth]. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Paul says to Timothy, preach the Word of God and nothing else! Stand ready to do it at all times and in every kind of situation – “in season and out of season.” The force of the original language is this: “Preach the Word when the Word is welcome in the ears of your hearers, yes; and also preach the Word when that Word is unwelcome in the ears of your hearers.” But always, the Word! Your preaching, Timothy, is not driven by what people want to hear or don't want to hear. Your preaching, Timothy, is to be Scripture-driven preaching. Preach the Word, Timothy! Preach that, and nothing else!

We should also note that Paul's challenge to Timothy comes immediately on the heels of those words we have read several times in this series of messages, that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for

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reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

And here in the beginning of 2nd Timothy chapter 4, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy to “reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

The word translated “reprove” means to expose error. The word translated “rebuke” means to denounce error, to express strong disapproval of it. The word “exhort” means to earnestly beg and plead with people, to encourage them, to urge them in the right direction. “Reprove, rebuke, and exhort.” How? “With all longsuffering and doctrine.” Do it with patience. Do it without ceasing. Do it unflinching. And do it with doctrine – instruct the people of God from the Word of God. Make sure your preaching of the Word, make sure your reproof, your correction, your instruction in righteousness, is from the Word of God and not the word of man.

And why is the preacher to do this? Because, Paul says in verse 3, “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.” People won’t want to put up with it. They will want to hear what they want to hear. They will want the service and the preaching to appeal to the natural man, the man who cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God because the Spirit of God isn’t living in him. They will want to be the purpose-driven church, driven by man’s purposes, not by God’s purpose.

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## **Sound Doctrine: The Definition**

And it's interesting to note that Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit uses the phrase "sound doctrine." Sound doctrine. The Greek word that is translated "sound" is the word from which we get our English word "hygiene." The word in the Greek has the meaning, "healthy." And it also carried the meaning "accurate." The sense of the phrase "sound doctrine" is, "teaching that is free from any mixture of error." Sound teaching. Healthy teaching.

A preacher who is not preaching sound doctrine from the Word of God, is no preacher at all. Ephesians chapter four, verse eleven tells us that this is the God-ordained role of the pastor. He is shepherd/teacher. The job of the shepherd is to lead the sheep in the path of sound doctrine.

And a Christian who is not taking in sound doctrine, a Christian who doesn't care about sound doctrine, a Christian who rejects sound doctrine, is no Christian at all. Such a person is a fraud. His profession of faith is a counterfeit.

Doctrine, teaching, instruction. That is the preacher's job. That is his life's work. That must be the individual Christian's main interest as well. It must be your lifetime pursuit.

And we note in the pages of the Word of God that doctrine, teaching, instruction always has two parts – there's the doctrine itself, and then there's the application of the doctrine. The pattern we always see in the Bible is doctrine first,

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then the application for living. You can't have proper application until you have a proper grasp of sound doctrine. The believer who is growing on a firm foundation is constantly taking in the nourishment of sound doctrine.

And so we have the answer to our three questions.

Question number one: What is sound doctrine? It is teaching that is free from any mixture of error. It is sound teaching. It is healthy teaching. It is teaching that provides the right kind of nourishment to the believer. It is teaching that produces growth in Christ. It is teaching that produces steadfastness in the faith.

Question number two: Where do you find it? The only source of sound doctrine is the Word of God. If someone is preaching and teaching something else, it is by definition not sound doctrine.

### **Sound Doctrine: The Proper Role of Confessions & Catechisms**

And dear friend, let me say this, and I know that some people who are listening may not like it, but it needs to be said. If the preaching in your church is always or nearly always from a confession of faith or from a catechism, and not from the Word of God itself, you need to be on your guard. Confessions and catechisms can be useful, but they are only useful if three things are true: if they are faithful to the Word of God, if they are always kept in a position of subordination to the Word of God, and if they are always explained only on the basis of the authority of the Word of God.



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Confessions of faith have been abused in two opposite kinds of ways. I know one denomination, for example, that claims to be conservative. But an official report of that denomination says that its confession of faith should be used as a vehicle to encourage theological creativity. And what has happened in that denomination? They have become so creative in their theology that anything goes. Today that denomination employs broad interpretations of its confessional standards in order to contradict the Word of God.

But dear friends, I also shudder when I hear people, even well-intentioned people, reject some false teaching by saying, "That's not in agreement with our confession of faith." That is the wrong way to address error. The issue is not agreement with a confession of faith written by fallible men. The issue is agreement with the words of Scripture breathed out by the infallible God. Error must always be addressed directly from Scripture. And then you can say, "And this is why our confession of faith says, thus and so..." The Word of God first, always. The word of man, second, always – and always in subordination to the Word. As Paul says in Romans chapter three, and this is the sense of the original language, "Let God be true, even though it makes every man a liar."

### **Sound Doctrine: The Berean Test**

That brings us to question number three: How can you be sure that what you are hearing or reading is sound doctrine? How can you be sure of it? There is only one sure test, and that is the Berean test. Acts chapter seventeen, verse eleven. When

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Paul came and preached to the people in Berea, “they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” This is the only test.

The Berean people “received the Word with all readiness of mind” – they were eager to hear it. But they didn’t stop there. They exercised discernment. They “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” The idea in the original language is that they “interrogated the Scriptures” – they investigated – they examined – they judged – not by their own way of thinking, but by what Scripture said. And they did this daily – not just once, not just occasionally, but constantly.

Every time they heard the preaching of the Word, they did this. They did this even though the man who was speaking to them was an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul’s position made no difference in this matter. Paul’s education made no difference in this matter. Paul’s presentation and delivery made no difference in this matter. What mattered was this question: According to the Word of God, according to the authority of Scripture alone, is what this man is saying the truth? That is the Berean test.

And that, dear friend, is the test you must employ every time you hear the Word of God preached in church, every time you listen to a radio or television program, every time you read a book that claims to exposit the Word of God. And dear friend, let me say that I hope you are doing that when you listen to me. Don’t take

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my word for anything. Hold me accountable. Hold what I say up to the standard of Scripture. And if you ever come to something that I say that you think may be in conflict with the Word of God, please don't keep quiet about it. Let me know about it. It may be a misunderstanding on your part. It may be that I have done a poor job of presenting the truth. Or, it may be that I am just plain wrong. This preacher is a human being. You and I need to be mutually accountable to the Word of God and to the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ.

Now, none of this is intended to denigrate the role of the preacher. The expository proclamation of the Word of God through the act of preaching is God's means of communicating His truth to human beings. The book of Ephesians tells us that God has given the church gifted men, gifted teachers, who devote their lives to the study of His Word. That is the job of the preacher. No preacher is infallible, but every preacher who is sincerely endeavoring to faithfully preach the Word is worthy of respect.

But dear friend, if you are in a church where the preaching and teaching is not passing the Berean test, and if you have respectfully made inquiries with the pastor and the answers and the defenses you are given are not firmly rooted in the truth of the Word of God, then by all means, leave that church. Have nothing to do with it. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. That is your responsibility in maintaining a solid battle front against the enemy of your soul.

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## **Sound Doctrine: Hard Work, But Highly Rewarding**

Dear friend, being rooted and grounded in sound doctrine is hard work. But it is rewarding work, essential work, both for this life and for eternity. And for that very reason, Satan will try to keep you from it. And these days, even many churches and many men who call themselves preachers will try to keep you from it. Let me explain what I mean.

These days a great many people who call themselves Evangelicals are saying that doctrine is unimportant. Doctrine is dull. Let's not talk about doctrine. Let's concentrate on our service. Let's concentrate on our participation in the life and the activities of the church. Or, more frequently these days, let's concentrate on success in life and feeling good about ourselves.

Dear friends, this is more and more the typical position of the postmodern Evangelical church. Doctrine is dull. Doctrine divides. We need unity, and it doesn't matter what we base that unity upon. Doctrine is a de-motivator. We need motivation. We need to feel good. Doctrine is a negative message. We want to be nothing but positive. So we don't need doctrine, they say. And so before very long, the Gospel isn't necessarily the *only* Gospel. Christ isn't necessarily the *only* way. And before very long, the church that pursues these things is not a true church of Jesus Christ.

Scripture makes it clear that such a position is spiritually disastrous. You cannot maintain a solid battle front against the enemy of your soul without the

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nourishment of sound doctrine. You cannot learn right living and right thinking unless God through Scripture puts the finger on the things in your life and in your thinking that are *not* right.

Dear friend, as I said, this is hard work, but it is rewarding work. As we read at the very beginning of Psalm 119, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart."

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