

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "The Imperative of Thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:7)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/20/2011

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The Church's Great Challenge

As we begin today let me call your attention once again to the Word of God in Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse five. The Apostle Paul, writing to the church under divine inspiration, delivers an urgent message for the church. Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse four:

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, 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 focusing on these verses for some time, because they tell us things that are critically important for the church in our time. We are dealing here with the great challenge that the church faces today. The Apostle Paul tells us that you as an individual Christian, and the Church of Jesus Christ as a body, face three serious threats to the Christian faith. We have seen that the source of these threats is none other than the enemy of the saints, the enemy of the Church, Satan himself. Satan

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seeks to undermine and destroy the church by putting forward a triple threat. He seeks to subvert and destroy the individual Christian, and the Church as a body, through the infiltration of three things into our life and thinking. And those three things, as we find them in Colossian chapter two, are worldly philosophy, legalism, and man-made doctrines.

We have seen that Paul not only warns us about these things, he also tells us how to deal with them. He tells us how to stand against the enemy. He tells us how to keep the enemy from gaining a foothold. He tells us that we need to put up, and keep up, a solid battle front against Satan’s threats. As we have seen, that is what Paul means when he speaks of “good order and steadfastness” in verse five. He is using military terms. He is speaking of taking up our battle positions, and staying in those battle positions, rooted and grounded in our faith in Christ.

Paul is telling us what we must do, to keep worldly philosophy, legalism, and man-made doctrines out of the church. And we have seen that this involves four major imperatives that we find in these verses:

First, we must walk an enlightened walk – verse 6: “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.”

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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: “you are,” Paul says, “complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”

Growing on a Firm Foundation: Imperatives

We are focusing right now on the second point: We must grow upon a firm foundation. We have seen that Paul in verse seven tells us several important things about this imperative of growing on a firm foundation.

First, we must put down strong roots in sound doctrine, in order that we may grow upward in Christ. That is the *basis* upon which we grow upon a firm foundation.

Secondly, we saw that we must constantly take in the nourishment of sound teaching. That is *how* we grow on a firm foundation.

Thirdly, and fourthly, we saw that the believer who is growing on a firm foundation possesses stability in the truth, and abounds in the truth. And this stability, this abounding, means that when this is true, Satan has a much harder time gaining a foothold in the thinking of the individual Christian, and in the thinking of the church as a body.

And then fifthly, we saw that growing on a firm foundation results in gratitude for Christ and for the truth. We took note of how Paul puts it at the end of verse seven: “rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith,” he says, “as you have been

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taught, abounding in it *with thanksgiving*.” There is this keynote of thanksgiving for the faith, this keynote of gratitude for the gifts of God in Christ and in His Word. That is the keynote in the life of the believer who is growing on a firm foundation. It is the keynote of the message of the church that is teaching the truth in its fullness.

The Imperative of Thankfulness

In our last message we looked at this primarily from a negative standpoint. As we looked at the history of the church, and as we took an honest look at the visible church in our time, we saw that unthankfulness – ingratitude for Christ and for the truth – is the common failing of those who lead the church into doctrinal deviancy, and it is the common failing of people in the church who follow after them.

Now, I believe it would be wrong for us to leave this particular point without emphasizing the positive aspect of it. And so I want to put this before us today as a question: What do we see, when this keynote of thanksgiving for Christ and for the truth is present? What do we see, in ourselves, when this is true? What do we see, in the life and the thinking and the message of the church, when this is true?

In answer to that question, I want to put before you seven things that we see when this is true. I’m not suggesting to you that this is an exhaustive list. But as we look at this matter across the length and breadth of the Word of God, I believe we see these important things.

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Abounding in the Faith with Thanksgiving: Seven Characteristics

First, thanksgiving for the faith recognizes the nature of God. Thanksgiving, gratitude, is the keynote of worship in a church that is true to the faith. Thus the Christian and the church that are rooted and grounded in the faith will say in the words of Psalm 100, "Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations" (Psalm 100:3-5).

"Therefore," says the writer to the Hebrews, because of the person and work of Jesus Christ, he says, "let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name" (Hebrews 13:15). Thanksgiving for the faith recognizes the nature of God.

Second, thanksgiving for the faith recognizes the nature of man and the nature of man's sin problem. And thus David writes, in Psalm 103, "Bless the LORD, oh my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, oh my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities...who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies. . . For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He

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knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. . . the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him” (Psalm 103:1-17). Thanksgiving for the faith recognizes the nature of man and the nature of man’s sin problem.

Third, thanksgiving for the faith recognizes the nature of salvation. As David proclaims in the psalm I just quoted, our salvation is a matter of mercy and grace alone. And it is not given to those who are wise and prudent and proud in worldly things, or proud in religion. It is given to those who humbly bow before God.

As Jesus himself said in Matthew chapter eleven, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.” And then Jesus continues, because this is true, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:25-30). Thanksgiving for the faith recognizes the nature of this great salvation, that it is all of Christ, and nothing of us.

Fourth, thanksgiving for the faith recognizes the vital importance of sound doctrine. Paul speaks of this in Romans chapter six: “But God be thanked,” he says, “that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered” (Romans 6:17). As the psalmist says in Psalm 94, “Blessed” – happy, in a joyful state of mind – “is the man whom You instruct, O Lord, and teach out of Your law, that You may give him rest from the days of adversity...”

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(Psalm 94:12-13). Thanksgiving for the faith recognizes the vital importance of sound doctrine.

Fifth, thanksgiving for the faith recognizes the nature of the Christian life: It is a life of thanksgiving. In Ephesians chapter five we find this: “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but” – notice – “rather giving of thanks” (Ephesians 5:1-4).

Thanksgiving for the faith recognizes the nature of the Christian life, that it is a life of thanksgiving. Dear friend, if you are not thankful for these things, I say to you with the Apostle Paul, examine yourself to see whether or not you are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Number six, thanksgiving for the faith recognizes the nature of the warfare in which we are involved. It recognizes that this is a warfare of the flesh against the Spirit. Paul tells us of this from his own experience, in Romans chapter seven. Beginning at verse twenty-two, he says, “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Notice the answer: “I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 7:22-25).

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Thanksgiving for the faith recognizes the nature of the warfare in which we are involved. The true believer gives thanks for victory over the flesh through the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And number seven, thanksgiving for the faith recognizes the deliverance we have received. Paul speaks of this in First Corinthians chapter fifteen, in his great prophecy of the Second Coming of Christ, beginning at verse 51. "So when this corruptible," he says, "has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory' The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But" – notice – "thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:51-58).

An Indispensible Element of Our Stand Against Satan

This is what we see, in the life and thinking of the believer, in the life and thinking and the message of the church, when this keynote of abounding thanksgiving for Christ and for the truth is present: Humble gratitude for the gifts of God in Christ. Humble submission to Christ and His Word. And coupled with it, an attitude of *revulsion* toward anything that diminishes Christ or adds to Christ.

Yes, we recognize that unthankfulness, ingratitude, is at the root of the problem in many churches today. It is the common failing, the common sin, of those who lead the

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church into doctrinal deviancy. And, it is the common sin of people in the church who follow after them. Ingratitude is at the root of the problem.

And so we recognize that abounding in the faith *with thanksgiving* is absolutely necessary. It is an indispensable element in our stand, as we put up and keep up our line of defense against Satan’s triple threat to the church. If you are truly rooted and grounded in Christ, you will be continually thankful for Christ and His Word. You will be continually thankful for all the riches that are yours in Christ.

It will overwhelm you. It will humble you. Abounding in the faith with thanksgiving will remind you how little you are, and how great God is. Abounding in the faith with thanksgiving will remind you how cheap the philosophy of this world is, compared to the wisdom of God in Christ. Abounding in the faith with thanksgiving will remind you what an insult legalism is to God, the very idea that you in your total depravity apart from Christ, could do anything that would merit salvation. And, abounding in the faith with thanksgiving will remind you what a travesty it is for any man or any church to set up man-made doctrines that add to or subtract from the settled Word of God.

“How Can They Be So Ungrateful?”

I was once in a situation some years ago, where this was really struck home to me by a faithful member of my own home church. In order for you to understand what this person said, I need to tell you what was going on in our church at the time.

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The leadership of our local church had become aware that the denomination to which our church belonged was no longer one hundred percent true to the Gospel. The denomination was permitting men to teach that it is necessary for us to have a righteousness of our own, in addition to the righteousness of Christ, in order to be saved. In other words, they were permitting the preaching of another gospel. In fact, they were not only permitting it, they were encouraging it.

Now, our local church was sound. We were standing firm in the truth, true to the Gospel. But our denomination was going down the road to destruction. Our denomination had been taken in by Satan's triple threat, the very things that Paul warns against here in Colossians chapter two.

The problem had started in the seminary that had trained most of our denomination's pastors. We found out that they were being trained in a worldly philosophy that put man's wisdom in authority over the Word of God. And so at the seminary level, the denomination gave into the first of Satan's triple threats, worldly philosophy.

And so what happened next? Well, men in the seminary classroom and in the pulpits soon gave in to the second of Satan's triple threats. They began to teach legalism. They began to teach that you needed to add a righteousness of your own to Christ's righteousness, in order to *be* saved and to *stay* saved.

And finally, this led the denomination to be defeated by the third of Satan's triple threats. They started setting up man-made doctrines as the official position of the

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church. It started when the board of one local church adopted a new doctrinal statement that made salvation by faith plus works the official position of the church. They replaced the pure doctrine of God's inerrant Word with doctrines that were devised by sinful men. But that was not the end of it. Within two years, the general assembly of the denomination made this apostate doctrinal position, this false gospel, an accepted position for the entire denomination.

Now, the leadership of our local church had opposed these actions. Other sound men had joined with us. But we found, much to our surprise and disappointment, that we were a minority. The majority surrendered to Satan's triple threat. And so the leadership of our local church decided that we had to leave the denomination. We could not be identified with this. And so we presented the facts of the situation to our congregation, and we asked them to vote on the question of whether we should leave the denomination or stay. I am thankful to say that the vote to leave was unanimous.

But I remember one thing in particular from the meeting in which that vote was taken. One of the members of the church, a dear faithful lady, raised her hand, and she asked this question: "How could those people who that say Christ's righteousness is not enough – how could they be so ungrateful to God? How could they be so unthankful for what Jesus has done?" And that lady was absolutely right. Ungratefulness, unthankfulness for the true faith, was at the very heart of the problem. It was at the very heart of a problem that subverted an entire denomination that had once stood firm for the truth.

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What of You? What of Your Church?

And so as we close today, I want to take you back once again to our question: What do we see, when this keynote of thanksgiving for Christ and for the truth is present? What do we see, in ourselves, when this is true? What do we see, in the life and the thinking and the message of the church, when this is true?

Here is the answer. We see an attitude of heart and mind that recognizes the nature of our great God, and is thankful for such a God. We see an attitude of heart and mind that recognizes our fallen nature, the nature of our sin problem. We see an attitude of heart and mind that abounds with thanksgiving for the salvation that is ours in Christ – an attitude of heart and mind that is grateful for the marvelous fact that God has done it all, Jesus paid it all, thanksgiving that there is nothing we could do or must do in order to have eternal life, but to trust in the finished work of our great God and Savior.

Furthermore, it is an attitude of heart and mind that recognizes the vital importance of sound doctrine. And it is an attitude of heart and mind that recognizes that the very nature of the Christian life is that it is a life of thanksgiving, a life lived in thanksgiving for God's unspeakable gift. It is an attitude of heart and mind that recognizes that we are in a warfare, but it recognizes with thanksgiving that Christ has won the victory. And it is an attitude of heart and mind that thankfully awaits the ultimate victory over Death and Hell when Jesus comes again.

Dear friend, are these things true of you? Are these things true of your church? I trust and pray that they are. And if they are not, I pray that you, and your church, will

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humbly seek the face of God in repentance, that you will seek after this keynote of abundant thanksgiving, that you absolutely must have, in order to defend yourself against Satan's triple threats.

About the Broadcast

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