

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Built Up in Christ: A Message to Preachers & Teachers" (Col. 2:7, 2 Tim. 3:13-4:5)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/27/2011

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The Most Serious Issue Facing Today's Church

As we begin today let me read for you, once again, the passage with which we are dealing at the present time, which is found in Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse four. The Apostle Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes this:

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 in our study of this passage, we are dealing with the most serious issue that the church is facing in our time. Satan is having great success today in leading individual Christians, and leading entire churches, away from the truth and into worldly philosophy, into legalism, and into man-made doctrines. We need to restore and maintain a solid battle front against Satan's triple threats to the church. And so the question is this: How are we to erect and maintain a solid battle front against these threats?

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We have been taking note of the fact that in these verses the Apostle Paul tells believers that we absolutely must do this. That is what he means when he speaks of "good order and steadfastness" here in verse six. He uses military language to describe what we need to do.

But Paul not only tells us that we need to do this, he tells us how to do it. In these verses he gives us four imperatives. At the present time we are focusing on the second of those imperatives. We find it in verse seven.

Paul says that in order to put up and keep up a strong and solid battle front against Satan's triple threat, we must grow upon a firm foundation, "rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving."

Now, in this verse, 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. Secondly, we saw that the believer who is growing on a firm foundation possesses stability in the truth. Thirdly, we saw that the believer who is growing on a firm foundation is constantly taking in the nourishment of sound teaching. Fourth, we saw that the believer who is growing on a firm foundation abounds in these things. Fifth, we saw that the thinking of the believer who is growing on a firm foundation has, as its keynote, thanksgiving, gratitude, for Christ and for the truth.

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The Vital Necessity of Sound Teaching by Faithful men

Now, in this verse, verse seven, there is one more important consideration, and it is this: All of these aspects of growing upon a firm foundation are largely dependent upon continual sound teaching by faithful men. Notice how Paul puts it in verse seven: "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith," – notice – "*as you have been taught...*"

Now, all teaching involves communication, and there are two sides to any communication. There are, of course, on the one side, the people who are being taught; in this case, the people of the church. That is one side of the communication.

But by whom were they taught? The context of the passage tells us the answer. They had been taught by men who were faithful to the Word of God. By Paul, by Timothy, and by Epaphras, as Paul tells us in chapter one. That is the other side of the communication.

And in chapter one, verse twenty-eight Paul tells us the goal of this communication: "Warning every man," he says, "and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect [or complete] in Christ Jesus."

In Ephesians chapter four, beginning at verse eleven, Paul says that this is the purpose of Gospel preaching and teaching. Jesus Christ Himself has given pastors

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and teachers to the church, Paul says, “for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect [or complete] man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head” — Jesus Christ.

And so Paul repeats the same thought here in Colossians chapter two – “rooted and built up in Christ and established in the faith, *as you have been taught.*” And dear friends, this brings us to the crux of the problem in many churches today. In our time there is a famine of Bible teaching in the Evangelical church. There is a famine of systematic, expository preaching of the whole counsel of God as it is found only in the Word of God.

Paul says that if we are to put up and keep up a solid battle front against Satan’s triple threat to the church, we must have sound preaching and teaching by faithful men. It is indispensable.

Now, we need to approach this great need from the two standpoints that I mentioned, the standpoint of the preacher or teacher, and also from the standpoint of the hearers in the church.

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Essential Questions for the Preacher and Teacher

And so today I am going to take up this issue first from the standpoint of the preacher. Now, what I am going to say to the preacher is also vitally important to the people who listen to the preacher. So if you are a preacher or teacher, I trust you will hear me out. And if you are a church member I trust you will also hear me out, because you need to hear this as well.

And as I begin by primarily addressing preachers and teachers, let me freely admit that as I am preaching to you, I am also preaching to myself. Believe me, I could not preach this message to anyone else if the Lord had not first preached it to me in the preparation of this message. This passage brings us face to face with a probing question. The question is this:

Preacher, are you teaching the truth? Are you preaching and teaching in complete submission to the sole authority of the Word of God?

Or, are you placing some kind of man-made matrix over the Bible that influences all of your teaching, perhaps obscures the truth, or perhaps even twists or denies the truth?

Are you placing some agenda of your own over the Bible, and are you preaching according to that agenda? In other words, is the keynote of your preaching, "Thus says the Lord," or is it merely, "Thus says this preacher"?

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These are not impertinent questions. They are questions that every preacher must ask himself continually. Satan has a very simple but highly effective strategy. If Satan can draw the preacher away from the clear and single-minded proclamation of the truth, he can draw your whole congregation away with you.

This is a great responsibility. A grave responsibility. And so you must always ask the question: Am I coming into the pulpit with a message from God? You are an ambassador for Christ. An ambassador speaks the words of the one who sends him on the authority of the one who sends him. An ambassador for Christ can only speak Christ's message by Christ's authority.

Dear preacher friend, if you and I come into the pulpit with anything else, we have sinned. We have deserted our duty and our calling. Our job is to direct people's attention to the Word of God. We are to warn every man from the Word. We are to teach every man from the Word. And the goal is that we may present every individual the Lord has given into our spiritual care, complete in the Word, in the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no higher calling, and there is no greater responsibility.

Paul's Exhortations to Timothy

That is why Paul says to Timothy the words that I have called to our attention so many times in this series. We find them at the end of Second Timothy chapter three and continuing into the opening verses of chapter four. Second Timothy chapter three, and I'm beginning at verse thirteen. Paul says this to Timothy:

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But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

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 doctrine.

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. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." (2 Timothy 3:13-4:5)

Paul says, to this young preacher Timothy and to every preacher, he says you need to be faithful to the Word because "evil men and imposters will grow worse

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and worse, deceiving and being deceived." Don't be deceived yourself. Your preaching must be the antidote to deception, the defense against deception. And what is the deception? It's the very deception we've been considering here in Colossians chapter two, Satan's triple threat to the church – worldly philosophy, legalism, man-made doctrines.

Satan's Strategy, Our Defense

Sound preaching by faithful men is an essential element of the battle front that we must put up, and keep up, against Satan's triple threat to the church. If Satan can deceive the preacher, he can deceive a whole church. If Satan can deceive a seminary professor, he can deceive an entire generation of seminary students. It has happened. It is happening, even in our time, even in reputedly conservative Bible colleges and seminaries. "Evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived," Paul says. Or as Jude puts it at the beginning of his epistle, ungodly men will creep in unnoticed.

Don't be one of them, Paul says to Timothy. "But you," he says, you "must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Notice how Paul puts it here. First of all, he says to Timothy, you have learned these things from me. You have seen my life. You have seen my ministry. You

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have seen my faithfulness to the Scriptures. You have seen how I myself have been persecuted for taking that stand, and you have seen that I have not wavered from it. But, Paul says, you have also been *assured* of the things I have taught you. And what has been the source of that assurance? Scripture itself. You yourself, Timothy, "have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." What I have taught you, Timothy, I have not taught you on my own authority. I have taught you these things on the authority of Holy Scripture.

And then Paul goes on to say that it is not just some Scripture, but all Scripture. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." A better translation would be "every word of Scripture." This is God's very Word you are dealing with, Timothy. This is not man's word. God didn't merely supervise the writing of Scripture. Every bit of Scripture is "given by inspiration of God." Literally, in the original language, every bit of Scripture is "God-breathed." It came directly from the mouth of God. He spoke it, He breathed it out. That is what we mean when we speak of the doctrine of the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture. That is the teaching of Second Timothy 3:16.

The Whole Counsel of God

When a preacher or teacher teaches the Scriptures he is teaching the very words of God. There can be no higher responsibility than to handle the Word of God carefully in the pulpit. This is why Paul tells the Corinthian church, at the beginning

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of Second Corinthians chapter four, "We have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:2).

We have not followed any agenda that is based on human wisdom. That is what Paul means when he says "we have not walked in craftiness." We have not adulterated the Word of God. That is what he means when he says, "we have not handled the Word of God deceitfully." No, we have renounced such things, once and for all. We have handled God's Word with the utmost care. We have proclaimed God's Word in its purity. We have not imposed our own agenda on the Word of God, as some other men are doing.

And, as Paul says here in Second Timothy, it must be "all Scripture." Not just our pet Scriptures. Not just the ones we feel most comfortable preaching. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

And thus Paul told the elders of Ephesus, Acts 20:27, "I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God." I haven't avoided any of it. I haven't held back. I haven't been timid about it. I haven't hesitated for a moment. I have declared all of it to you, because you need all of it. You must have all of it.

And why, Paul says? Because "savage wolves" are going to come in among you. Even "from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw

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away disciples after themselves." I have proclaimed the whole counsel of God to you, Paul says, because the whole counsel of God is your defense against such men and such teachings.

And then in this passage in Second Timothy to which I have directed our attention, Paul gives this solemn charge to Timothy: "I charge you therefore" – I solemnly command you, because these things are true – "before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the Word!" The Word of God alone.

Let Nothing Else Dictate What You Preach

And "be ready" to do it, Paul says, "in season and out of season." What this literally means is this: Preach the Word when people are ready and willing to hear it, and also preach the Word when people are not ready and not willing to hear it. But always, the Word. The prevailing culture must never dictate what you preach. Church tradition must never dictate what you preach. Your own assessment of what may seem suitable to preach or not suitable to preach must never dictate what you preach. Concern for your reputation, for acceptance, for popularity must never dictate what you preach. Do not hold back, Paul says, from declaring the whole counsel of God. "Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine."

And why is this so vital? "For the time will come," Paul says, "when they will not endure sound doctrine." Satan's attack is going to come. Satan is going to deploy one or more of his triple threats – worldly philosophy, legalism, man-made

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doctrines, sometimes individually, often in combination. He is going to try to undermine the church. "According to their own desires," Paul says, "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."

The Preacher is God's Watchman

"But you," Paul says, you the Gospel preacher, "be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." Preacher, teacher, your ministry is this great high calling, this grave responsibility. You are the watchman on the wall. The Lord said this to the prophet Ezekiel, chapter thirty-three. "Son of man, I have made you a watchman over My people." When the watchmen "sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning... his blood shall be on his own head... But he who takes warning will save his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them...his blood I will require at the watchman's hand" (Ezekiel 33:1-6).

Preacher, teacher, you are a watchman on the wall. You are a watchmen over the souls of God's people. That is what you are, whether you like it or not. And so, as Paul says to Timothy, you must "be watchful in all things." You must be on the lookout for Satan's threats. You must be on the lookout for Satan's threats to your own life and ministry. You must be on the lookout for Satan's threats to the life and

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ministry and message of the church. You must warn the people. You must teach the people. You must give them the whole counsel of God. You must equip them to meet and defeat the enemy of the church.

And so this is the one side of Paul's great statement here in Colossians chapter two, verse seven, that believers are to be "rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith, *as you have been taught...*" The preacher and teacher have this great responsibility. But those who are the listeners, those who are being taught, also have a great responsibility. And that, the Lord willing, will be the focus of our next message.

About the Broadcast

The Scripture-Driven Church airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is to preach the Gospel to the lost, and to equip believers to stand upon and live by the sole authority of God's Word, to the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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