

## Christ is Sufficient!

Col 2:1-15

Have you ever had **buyer's remorse**? You bought that item, that you thought you needed, and then a while later, you realized it was more of a want than a necessity? Or when you got home, showed it around, bragged about it, it was such a good deal, but no one seemed really excited about that item? Or you felt bad when you discovered that you could have found the same item elsewhere, at a much lower cost? Buyer's remorse is frequently associated with the purchase of an expensive item, but this is an emotion that can happen with any purchase and even in some form, with any decision.

Psychologists define buyer's remorse as a type of cognitive dissonance. As humans, some times we want things that are in direct opposition to each other. For example, we want to buy a house, and we also want to travel and eat out and have a nice lifestyle. The moment we commit to one path, we worry that the other choice might have made us happier or more secure. Sometimes it's the tension between immediate satisfaction and long range goals.

We humans deal with buyer's remorse by making "post-purchase and post decision rationalizations." These sometimes can stave off buyer's remorse if they're easy to uphold. For example, we rationalize that buying a home was the right financial move, or that we now have a shorter commute with this house, or that we have a good tool for work, or we look better in this dress, or whatever rationalization relates to things we value. When it's not so easy to rationalize though, we start to have problem.

Well, in our scripture today we have Paul starting to make a big deal about faith buyer's remorse. He's getting to a main reason he wrote Colossians. He has been teaching about the importance of being fully "in Christ," with many compliments. An interesting exercise for us can be, circle how often this book mentions, "Christ" and the attributes or benefits tied to Him. Like "knowing the mystery of God, namely, Christ." (2:2)

But in this passage, he's putting out a **warning label** on the false teachers and their theology. "This product may be hazardous to your spiritual health." We know many products carry a required warning label. So here Paul exposes teachings that he considered hazardous to spiritual health, so people will not be fooled and have buyer's remorse.

So let's dive in, starting at verse 4. "**I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine sounding arguments.**" This is like a warning shot across the bow. Up to this point the focus has been on what Almighty God has done, and what the Colossian believers have experienced. But now the "gloves are off," so to speak. Paul is warning them about the dangers of smooth talk, false reasoning and persuasive rhetoric.

Verse 4 is a warning, but verse 5 is another compliment – "how disciplined and firm in the faith you are." So Paul keeps on affirming the believers, but he also alerts them to danger. He doesn't fully label the threats but we receive a number of clues as to what he was worried about. But more space is given to the positive affirmations than the negative elements.

We know that we are always in danger of being fooled. There were a number of reasons people like Bernie Madoff was such a successful con-man and took millions off investors. There are real reasons we all get phone calls from total strangers that try to get our money. We have to be on guard because we have the infinite capacity to be deceived & to deceive ourselves.

The book, Talking with Strangers, says most of us are wired to, "**default to trust.**" By this the author means, we human beings are by nature trusting - of people, technology, everything. But at times, we are too trusting, with tragic results. However, we would never leave the house, if we did not suppress thoughts of worst-case scenarios. We definitely would not go on dating apps or invest in stocks or let our kids take gymnastics or trust online banking. If we never trusted, we would have economic, social, political and religious paralysis.

So we need to, “trust but verify” as Ronald Reagan said. This is why I have always told people, read the Bible, get information on your own. Don’t just automatically believe me. Do your own research, study and thinking based on provable facts. It is important in life to be trusting. Yet we also need to be skeptics.

So we see here in chapter 2 that Paul’s tone changes. For the first time we find imperatives and directives. Up to now the letter has been concerned with what God has done and what the Colossian believers have experienced. But now comes 4 specific instructions. Verses 6 & 7, which we will look at today. Then for next week, verse 8, verses 16 & 17, verses 18 & 19.

In Colossians 2:6-7, Paul mixes several **metaphors** in order to describe the process of spiritual growth. Many commentators believe this is the theme of the entire book, or the hinge point of Colossians. On the faith side, the Colossians had received Christ Jesus as Lord and had been taught the faith. On the practice side, we need to continue to live in Him and be built up in Him, becoming strengthened in our faith and overflowing with thankfulness, so we are not fooled and have buyers remorse.

This has to be one of the most difficult texts that Paul wrote. For those who hear or read it the first time, it is crystal clear. But the trouble is that this text is packed with **allusions** to the false teaching threatening the Colossian Church. We do not know precisely what those teachings were. So the allusions are obscure and we can only guess. It’s like only reading the emails you receive, and not the ones you send. Or listening to only one side of a phone conversation. So we have to read carefully and make some guesses based on what was going on at the time in the Colossae congregation. Imagery is always used to help communication. And here we have language translation issues.

So let’s study **verses 6 and 7**: “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

The Message version reads like this: “My counsel for you is simple and straightforward: Just go ahead with what you’ve been given. You received Christ Jesus, the Master; now live him. You’re deeply rooted in him. You’re well constructed upon him. You know your way around the faith. Now do what you’ve been taught. School’s out; quit studying the subject and start living it! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving.”

This sounds complimentary! But it’s also an admonition to live as they have been taught at conversion. Paul is saying, “You were correctly taught about faith, now keep it up and don’t get sidetracked or go backwards!” Don’t be fooled and then have buyers remorse. These phrases are loaded. “As you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him.” To emphasize that Paul offers the images of, built up and rooted in him. Then he reminds them to be strong in faith as you were taught.” And he finishes up with, “overflowing with thankfulness.” These are compliments but underneath there may be a sense that the believers are not living up to what they had learned.

On the one hand its wonderful encouragement. On the other, it needs to be read like a warning, based on everything previously in the letter. Some commentators focus on the allusions this text provides – and we need to know our Greek a little. The 6 allusions, metaphors or imagery in verses 5, 6 and 7, remind readers of: soldiers, athletes, trees, builders, students and rivers.

So for the allusion to **soldiering**, which Paul uses in his writings, we look at **verse 5**. The words here offer the concept of obedience & orderliness. A soldier has to have discipline. Armies need to be organized and follow orders. Their members need to be solidly united against the enemy. They need to have both defensive and offensive postures. The word firmness here means a solid bulwark, an immovable phalanx, shields locked, like riot police, which the Roman army was really good at. So Paul with a few words is conveying that the believers should behave with unity, together like an army, against heresy’s and for Christ.

Next, the Christian life must be lived out, committed. This term literally means “**walk.**” It’s to go from our head, to our hearts, mouths, hands, and then to our feet, where we **power walk.** When Paul says, “Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him,” he’s reminding his readers that since they received Jesus by faith, so too they must walk by faith in His power. That’s the only way to make spiritual progress. The verb indicates continuous action. We are to continue to live in Christ. The past event of receiving him should be a present reality in our lives. Our conduct must be consistent with His lordship. Our worship & lives should affect our walk and our practices must conform to God’s principles.

Paul is reminding his readers they haven’t just received the doctrines of Christ – head knowledge; they had also received Christ Himself. The title, “Christ Jesus as Lord” is unique, occurring only here in Paul’s letters. As Christ, He is identified as the Messiah, or “anointed one,” promised to Adam, Abraham, and Moses and prophesied about by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah. Jesus was his human name given at His birth and means Savior. Lord indicates that He is supreme and sovereign. He has no rivals and we must bow before His preeminence and his instructions. Paul wants our present and continuous conduct to conform to the doctrine taught us at the beginning, the doctrine we committed ourselves to at conversion.

This is backed up by the next two allusions. Rooted is an agricultural metaphor, just as a **tree** is “rooted,” we are to be grounded in the soil of God’s Word. The tense of the Greek word means, “once and for all having been rooted.” Those who have received Christ are rooted in Him. A tree puts down deep roots in order to find nutrition and to provide stability. Likewise, we must go deep with Christ to find the fuel we need to flourish, and in order to withstand the storms of life, including heresy.

This image most likely comes from the beautiful picture in Jeremiah 17:8: “He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out

its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.” When we are rooted in a relationship with Christ, we will have everything we need for life and for godliness. Just as a tree cannot thrive without any roots, so too, we cannot grow if we have not been grounded in His glory and goodness.

The next image is **build.** Paul uses this construction image to show that as our foundation is built on Christ, we must continue to add on so that we’re “being built up in him.” Ephesians 2:20 tells us that at conversion we were “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone.” A cornerstone is a big stone placed at the intersecting angle, where two walls of a building came together. In biblical times, buildings were often made of cut rock. By uniting two intersecting walls, a cornerstone helps align the whole structure and tie it together. In the same way, as the chief cornerstone, Jesus holds everything together and provides alignment to our lives.

God doesn’t want us to stop with conversion; instead He longs for us to construct our lives with a firm foundation and strong solid materials. Again, the tense of the verb indicates that the building keeps on going. The Christian life is not meant to be a one or two-story house, but rather a skyscraper that just keeps going up! Christ is both the source of the Christian life & the foundation of our stability.

The next metaphor is more direct and is found in the phrase, “strengthened in the faith as you were taught.” We are to be **students** in God’s graduate school so that our faith can be strengthened, or established. We have to keep learning our whole lives long. Often the Bible asks us to have the attitude and posture of students. We must be taught the Word of God in order to grow in our faith. Paul is saying, certain beliefs are foundational, like being In Christ, and we can’t divert from this.

Just like with many jobs, we have to keep learning or we eventually are laid off, and at a minimum don't get promoted or receive better pay. Since a disciple must always be learning, make sure you are putting yourself in an environment where you can study and be spiritually strengthened on a regular basis. And temptations don't stop.

The sixth allusion is a word picture of a **river** bursting over its banks. It's based on the phrase, "overflowing with thankfulness." This is a distinguishing mark of a healthy congregation. As we look for and receive instruction in biblical truth it should produce inner joy. The more we understand grace, the more gratitude we will have. Kent Hughes writes, "A thankless spirit betrays a life which is no longer focusing on the greatness of Christ." If you don't feel very thankful today, it's probably because you've taken your eyes off of Jesus and put them on your problems.

Epictetus was not a Christian. So these words are very ironic! But even that little slave, who became one of the great moral teachers of paganism, wrote: "What else can I, a lame old man, do but sing hymns to God? If, indeed I were a nightingale, I would be singing as a nightingale; if as a swan, as a swan. But as it is, I am a rational being, therefore I must be singing hymns of praise to God. This is my task; I do it, and will not desert this post, as long as it may be given me to fill it; and I exhort you to join with me in this same song." Followers of Jesus can do even better & more.

It's an interesting tactic of Paul's to not spend too much time on what the believers in Colossae were doing wrong. He offers warnings but also spends an inordinate amount of words – praising them and reminding them of what being in Christ is all about. If they fully live these traits and images – we won't have buyers remorse. Instead we will have the opposite, because we keep fully living the faith.

So what does all this mean for you and I? We find that Paul, despite his real concerns, which we have been listing, goes out of his way to

affirm the believers at Colossae. He spends time building them up as he reminds them that they are in Christ. And he urges them to want more of what is available for them. Plus, don't be deceived by nice sounding arguments – philosophies, mystery's and so on, which leads to being conned and buyers remorse.

And in our scripture today he offers again, another reminder of who believers are. In verse 9 and 10 he says in effect – you have a precious gift. It's a key antidote to false teaching. "For in Christ all the **fullness of the Deity** lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority." It's religion from the inside out.

Paul finishes this section with **5 clear reasons, 5 truths**, that all we need is Christ. He says we are **complete, full** in Christ. Verse 10. We don't need other ideas.

We are circumcised in him. Verse 11. **Circumcision** is used probably referring to three ideas. First we put off our old self. Second we put on God's new self. Third, it stands for baptism not physical circumcision.

Next, Paul reminds his readers, how we are **alive in Christ** and dead to sins. Verses 12-13. He has forgiven sins and conquered death.

Then in verse 14 he points out we are **free in Christ**. And fifth, he follows this up in verse 15, reminding us we are **victorious because he is** over all powers and authorities.

The apostle Paul attacks the false teaching head on. He shows that false teachers are not adding anything to our faith. Instead they are taking away from their faith. They are cheating them and stealing away what they actually have in Christ! They were conning people. This is a good set up for the next verses about freedom from human rules, we will look at later.

A summary of Colossians as J.B. Philips translates it: "Christ is all that matters." (3:11) Let's not be conned and have buyers remorse. May we experience Christ is sufficient!