

**Our Claim to Truth In Christ** | *Colossians 2:8-15 (NIV)*

Faith Evangelical Free Church

Sunday, June 12, 2022

*8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.*

*9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. 11 In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

*13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

The passage we are going to look at this morning provides us with the opportunity to discuss something that is becoming increasingly more important with every passing day: how do we, as followers of Jesus Christ, figure out and live according to what is true?

This is a really hard question to answer, because at no time in all of human history have people ever had so many choices, so much content, so many opinions and worldviews competing for their attention or devotion. Every single day you and I walk out into a world full of people, organizations, corporations, political parties, religious institutions, advocacy groups, and more, all ready to challenge our beliefs, change our values, and demand that we think and act and live according to what they proclaim.

There is almost nothing in our lives anymore that someone is not trying to get us to switch sides on. And while much, perhaps most of this daily battle happens over things that ultimately hardly matters (*do you like the newest Marvel movie, is the parking garage in Aggieville ugly or kind of okay, is WhatABurger really any good*)...there are instances when the beliefs that are closest to our heart are called out, doubted, and declared to be wrong by others. There are times when the truth of the Gospel, of our salvation, and of our Savior are questioned.

What do we do when that happens? What do we do when we begin to question what is worthy of our trust? How do we decide what is acceptable for us to include in our understanding of how the world works?

These are the same kinds of questions that the Christians in Colossae were asking themselves 2000 years ago. From the context of the Apostle Paul's letter to these believers, we know that some people – teachers and followers of a way of life different than that of Christianity – had arrived in the city and told the followers of Jesus that their faith in Christ was not enough. They said more was needed. More ceremony, more sacrifice, more rules and regulations. According to these people the Gospel – the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and all the implications for salvation and new life that flow from it – that Gospel was just not good enough to really be called

“truth” or secure salvation. And the Christians of Colosse heard these challenges and wondered, “how do we figure out whether or not what these teachers say is true?”

In response, the Apostle Paul writes this letter, and in 2:8-15 he issues a very clear command and a big, bold claim:

*The Command:* **Do not be fooled into believing what is false.**

*The Claim:* **Because you can be confident of all that you know to be true in Christ.**

These may seem like simple or straightforward ideas. But honestly, the deeper you press into them the more you realize just how tricky it can be to refuse what is false and keep to what is true. We’ll unpack this command and claim as we work through the passage this morning, but before going any further I am going to ask each and every one of you to do something humbling and hard: I’m going to ask you to seriously consider that this is a biblical correction you probably need.

You have more than likely, very recently, been fooled by something that is false. You have more than likely, very recently, traded your confidence in Christ for something that may seem flashier or more relevant...but is ultimately powerless.

If that suggestion makes you squirm a bit right now...that discomfort may very well be conviction. But instead of running from it or fighting against it, let’s seek how we might confess our errors and correct our path. Let’s all of us together consider how we might repent from falsehood and move closer to all that is good and beautiful and true in Christ.

To do this, we’re going to go back and look at v8 again and consider Paul’s command: **Do not be fooled into believing what is false.**

*8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.*

Colossians 2 (NIV)

“*See to it*”, Paul says – take special care, pay particular attention to what you believe so that you are not taken captive, overpowered by, or swept up and away and into believing “*hollow and deceptive philosophy*”.

There is a subtle yet incredibly important instruction to notice here at the beginning of v8: ***YOU are responsible for your own thinking. YOU are responsible for your own grasp of the truth.*** YOU are accountable for the things you believe, the things you say, the things you share, and the things you present to others as true. YOU are to see to it that you are not fooled by falsehood.

As a follower of Jesus Christ you need to be aware of your personal responsibility, to the best of your ability, to speak only what is true. You must take the time to consider the things you hear, the news you read, the experts you listen to, and the people who influence you, and carefully determine how much of what they say is true and worthy of trust.

We live in a world obsessed with rapid reaction and breaking news. We all too often hear about something, spend a little bit of time googling it or reading quickly written editorials from sources most closely aligned with our own preferences and biases, declare our 30 minutes of internet surfing “research”, then charge forward into the social arena with what we’ve convinced ourselves is a very righteous position.

We would be much better off to remember that throughout Scripture the righteous are those who are *quick to listen and slow to speak*. Proverbs 29:20 asks

*20 Do you see someone who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for them.*

Proverbs 29

My point is this: before we can even get to the process of discerning what is false and what is true, the first crucial step is: **SLOW DOWN**. Give yourself time to listen, learn, and think. Give yourself time to pray for wisdom and discernment before determining what you believe to be true.

If you discover that you have a pattern or habit of sharing information or opinions that sounded true, but later you found out were full of false information, then you likely need to repent. And as a reminder, repentance is not just confessing you were wrong and seeking forgiveness. Repentance is turning around, it’s changing your ways. ***To repeatedly engage in spreading false information, even in ignorance, is disobedience. It is not something that should characterize the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ.***

And we ***all need to do better***. We all need to see to it that we’re not so easily deceived.

We must be sure that we are not fooled by “*hollow and deceptive philosophy*” – by ways of thinking and acting that are devoid of intellectual, moral, and spiritual value. Such things are vain and full of lies. It’s more than just a misunderstanding...it’s systematically and disobediently wrong.

Paul provides a quick grid to help us determine what sort of things might qualify as “*hollow and deceptive philosophy*” (as the kind of stuff we really want to avoid believing or accepting as true):

- *Does it proclaim a truth dependent on human tradition?*
- *Does it proclaim a truth dependent on the idolatry of this world?*
- *Does it proclaim a truth dependent on anything other than Christ?*

If anyone tells you that something is absolutely, flawlessly, totally true and it falls into one of these categories, then you need to be careful and you need to examine it closely. Chances are pretty good it’s not going to be worth believing in.

Let’s take a look at this first one: ***Does it proclaim a truth dependent on human tradition?***

Another way of asking this might be, “did humans invent this or did God demand it?” Is the “truth” the product of human speculation or Divine proclamation?

The classic biblical example of this is from Mark 7, where Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for “*letting go of the commands of God and [instead] holding on to human traditions*” (7:8). They had added a bunch of rules, regulations, and requirements to their religion and demanded that people could only be righteous if they obeyed these extra, man-made laws. *But human traditions do not make someone righteous. Only faith in Christ and obedience to God’s will as revealed in his Word can do that.* You don’t need “Christ plus other stuff” to be a good disciple. You need Christ, and Christ alone, and the life that flows from that unique, glorious union with Christ.

What might a modern example of a “human tradition” sound like?

- ***“In order to be a Christian you have to be a member of the Republican Party”*** – that’s a human tradition. The truth is no political party can or should lay claim to our allegiance. It is given totally to Christ. We should never allow our affiliation to the right or the left (or anything in between) become a litmus test for faith. .
- ***“In order to be a Christian you have to remain silent about bad things that the church has done that could hurt its reputation”*** – that’s a human tradition. Church history does not need to be whitewashed, and church reputations are not worth the silencing or sacrifice of the people God loves. Cover-ups do far, far more damage to the Church than does confession.
- ***“In order to be a Christian you have to love everyone exactly the way they are and accept whatever they say is true and right for themselves”*** – that’s a human tradition. Followers of Christ are of course called to love all people, but love and permissiveness are not the same thing. Jesus showed us that it is possible to love others while still telling them the truth about what is right and what is wrong, what is sin and what is obedience. God’s will is our standard, Christ’s example is our model, and we must humbly walk the line of loving others while being honest about sin (including our own).

Here’s the bottom line: *qualifying someone’s Christianity by something other than their faith in Christ is a human tradition.* I am not saying the fruit of their life is not important – it absolutely is. I’m not saying there is no place for judgment, correction, or rebuke – there absolutely is. But far too often we get far too close to saying “you may have faith in Jesus, but you really also need to have \_\_\_\_\_”, and it’s that addendum that we must stop believing and must stop invoking.

Do not make the mistake of using man-made righteousness to measure the quality of your faith, or the faith of others. We preach Christ crucified. We glory in Christ resurrected. And we shape our lives around those truths.

The second warning of a hollow and deceptive philosophy was: ***Does it proclaim a truth dependent on the idolatry of this world?***

This one is a little tricky because the phrase “elemental spiritual forces” from v8 attempts to translate an extremely rare Greek word that was used to refer to what ancient peoples thought of as the fundamental elements of all creation – earth, air, wind, and fire – AND the spiritual/supernatural powers closely associated with those elements. So the danger Paul is calling out here is the tendency for all human beings to look at creation – whether material or spiritual – and give their worship to it rather than to God. We have a word for when something created receives the love and devotion that belongs to the Creator: idolatry. And any philosophy, any way of life that embraces idolatry is simply incompatible with being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

And before you write this warning off as something that may apply to other cultures, or be a problem in other parts of the world, consider this: we may not find many statues of gods or temples making sacrifices to appease the spirits in control of season or weather or fortunes...but we DO have a serious problems with idolatry in America. The supposed “gods” we are most often encouraged to worship and please are found not in sacred spaces...but in our own mirrors. Because here at home, in our day to day lives, the most common, insidious form of idolatry...is the **idolatry of self**. We are under a constant barrage of messaging that preaches a false gospel of the “power of you”.

- You determine your own truth.
- You determine your own worth.
- You determine your own identity, your own gender, sexuality on whatever spectrum you like the most.
- You determine the priority of your life, your rights, and your freedoms.
- You determine whether or not there is a “god”, and if you decide there is, you also decide what that god must be like to best fit how it might best fit your needs.
- You, in fact, are your own little god and the world owes you whatever reality you determine is best.

We are all, each and every day, encouraged by almost everything in the world around us to think in these ways. To put ourselves in the place of God and worship all that we want and think and say and determine for ourselves.

Consider how different and how warped a way of thinking this is when compared to, say, Job 38:

*1 Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said:  
2 “Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?  
3 Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.  
4 “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand.  
5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it?  
6 On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—  
7 while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?*

Job 38

Y’all, we are not gods. We are not worthy of worship. Our self-righteous thoughts and schemes and worldly idols are worthless. If you want to be free of hollow and deceptive philosophies, then you must rid yourself of all idolatry...including the kind that puts you at the center of everything. That space does not belong to you. It belongs to God alone.

Paul sums up his grid for determining hollow and deceptive philosophy with this question: ***Does it proclaim a truth dependent on anything other than Christ?***

It all comes down to this: is your worldview, your way of life, your moral compass, your hope, your assurance of salvation, your definition of who God is and what He expects of you...is all this dependent on Jesus Christ? If such things are depending on anything other than Christ, then they are misplaced, and their foundation is no better than shifting, sinking sand.

And why is this? How can we be so sure that Christ is really worthy of this sort of trust?

*The Command: Do not be fooled into believing what is false.*

*The Claim: Because you can be confident of all that you know to be true in Christ.*

In vv9-15, Paul launches into a grand declaration of the many beautiful, powerful, life changing and life giving promises we have in our Savior.

*9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and in Christ you have been brought to fullness...*

Colossians 2 (NIV)

**In Jesus – in Christ, in the incarnation of Emmanuel, God with us – all the “fullness”, the full nature and being of God dwells, permanently, in flesh-and-blood form.** *Wherever Christ is, there so too is God.* This means to be with God we don't need a temple or a place...we need a person. We need a relationship. We need as much closeness to and oneness with Christ as we can manage. Jesus preached the importance of abiding with him, just as a vine depends on a branch or a fruit depends on its tree, because to live in closeness with Christ is to move ever closer to the deep desire of God's own heart: that He would dwell with us, and we with Him, forever.

*9...He is the head over every power and authority.*

Colossians 2 (NIV)

**In Christ we follow the One who is in charge and in control.** No other power or authority (including yourself!) can be brought before Christ and claim supremacy. If you feel powerless or overwhelmed, if you look at all that is happening in the world and think “what hope is there in all this madness and evil and death”...remember that to follow Christ is to follow the one who defeated death. We can enjoy triumph over such powers, over such darkness, over all that is awful in this world...only in Christ.

*11 In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

Colossians 2 (NIV)

**In Christ we are brought into the only true promise of resurrected, everlasting life.** In Scripture circumcision is, fundamentally, a sign of covenant. It is a representation of being a part of something bigger than yourself, of a promise between us and God. And although physical circumcision was demanded in the Old Testament, the “circumcision” that Paul speaks of here is not one we perform, but one performed by Christ through our union with him in faith. Christ “cuts away” or “puts off” the “flesh” (which is a shorthand way of saying our life of sin), rendering us capable of truly following him.

The payoff in all this is that instead of being captive by hollow and deceptive ways of life that can only let you down and will never live up to what they claim, you can take part in the promise of everything – of life, of freedom, of the work of God himself.

*13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.*

Colossians 2 (NIV)

**In Christ we have all the true freedom we desperately need but cannot attain on our own: freedom from sin, freedom from guilt, and freedom from death.** We were all, each and every one of us, dead in our sins. Stuck in a “fleshly” sin-riddled life, that could have only one outcome: eternal condemnation under the just wrath of a brokenhearted yet holy God. That same God, in the greatness and the mystery and the awesome power of his love, made us alive in Christ.

***All your sins are forgiven.*** I know you’ve heard that before, but don’t you dare let it become something you consider common or old news, just another theological truism tucked away in corners of your memory. Everything you have ever done, or ever will do that disqualifies you from sharing in the presence of God...every single one of those things has been wiped away, totally removed, blotted out, eliminated at unimaginable cost.

The ledger of record of the sins of the world – your sins, my sins, the sins of the person on your left and on your right – was held in the hands and the heart and the will of the One pierced by rusty iron nails driven through innocent flesh, deep into the blood soaked wood of the cross.

You and I are set free of all that ought to condemn us thanks to our Christ who died, our Christ who is Risen, and our Christ who will come again.

*15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

Colossians 2 (NIV)

**In Christ we have victory.** The power of sin and death is broken. The cross – that horrifying method of murder against the King of Creation – was transformed into a mighty triumph over all evil. We may still live in a fallen world, but the darkness and all of its agents have been disarmed. In Christ, your Savior lives. He reigns. And the power of his victory is available to all who follow him, draw near to him, and abide with him each and every day.

You might be sitting there thinking, “*okay, that’s all really great stuff to hear about Jesus, and I totally agree...but how does all this help me not be fooled by all this false in the world?*”

When you are confident of all that you know to be true in Christ, and when you commit yourself and humble yourself every day to a worldview full of his presence, his kingship, his control, his forgiveness, his victory...I truly believe that two things will begin to happen:

- (1) You are going to care a whole lot less about being right in the eyes of the world, and a whole lot more about being righteous in the eyes of the Lord.
- (2) Because of this, your conduct and character will begin to look more and more like that of Christ.
  - (a) You’re going to love God, love one another, and love your neighbor as yourself.
  - (b) You are going to delight in things like peace, patience, kindness, and goodness.

- (c) You are going to look at Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and say "that's how I want to live my life!" Seeking the Kingdom of God, accepting meekness as a blessing, being a peacemaker, and being satisfied by nothing but Words of our Savior.
- (d) You are going to learn, more and more, how to speak the truth in love. You'll stop seeking to be the loudest voice in the room (or on the internet), and seek more and more to be the most compassionate voice in the lives of broken people who need to get to know Jesus.

*The Command:* **Do not be fooled into believing what is false.**

*The Claim:* **Because you can be confident of all that you know to be true in Christ.**

So I'd challenge you to do two things this week:

- (1) Go before the Lord and ask Him to reveal any place you have been fooled by what is false in this world. Any place you have accepted hollow and deceitful philosophies. Ask God to expose where you have accepted the lies of human traditions, of idolatry, or of anything that opposes Christ...and repent. Really, truly, repent. Seek forgiveness and commit to change. Stop spreading what is false.
- (2) Really, truly look at all you can know to be true in Christ, and praise him for it. Write prayers, sing songs, tell others. You are a follower of the King of Victory. Rejoice in that truth. It's more wonderful than anything this world could possibly have to offer.