

Staying Rooted

Colossians 2:6-19

July 25, 2010

He appeared on the scene at just the right time. The people were weary and fed up with the status quo which had advanced them to nowhere, yet at great cost to them personally as well as to their country. He was a charismatic leader who came from common people... not from royalty nor from the educated elite. He spoke from the heart with great passion and he presented himself so well and spoke of such a wondrous future that the people flocked to him.

He rose to power with meteoric speed. The people adored him. Puffed up with the arrogance of power, and feeding off the adoration, he began to put a plan in motion that would change the world for generations, and the history of his nation forever. You've probably guessed his name... Hitler.

Even church members clamored to his side and soon there was a great movement in the church simply called "German Christians." They helped Hitler's rise to power and regarded his many words as equal to the divine revelation of Scripture. They revered him as a prophet, and many certainly viewed him as even more than a prophet. The "German Christians" even began to elevate "racial consciousness," endorsing a claim that Germany had a divine call to enlarge its borders. He instituted a pogrom against the Jews which we have come to know as the holocaust.

Many of the German people believed the good things that were being said about Hitler and his plan for his people. It wasn't difficult for many to get on board. Their beliefs helped them make hard choices about how to treat their neighbors and even loved ones that the Reich deemed unworthy. It seemed as if all the fun people, all the creative business leaders, all the intelligent people, and all the beautiful people were pledging allegiance and even more – their lives and their worship – to Hitler.

This greatly concerned a number of evangelical Christians and Christian leaders in Germany. In 1934 concerned pastors met and signed a bold statement of beliefs. It was called the Barmen Declaration. Central in the Barmen Declaration were truths about Christ revealed in Scripture: He is the only Way of salvation, and He alone is the Lord. One concerned pastor who signed the Declaration was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He signed because he believed, above all else that Christ, and Christ alone is the Son of God, is God, and is Lord... not the *Volk* of Germany, not Hitler, and not even the church – but Christ is Lord.

His beliefs led him to bold proclamation of the truth. Even though he resisted going into the political arena with every fiber of his being, his beliefs took him there. He stood with Jews, aiding in their hiding and smuggling them out of Germany. He could have remained in safety in the United States where he was shortly before war broke out – and he could have gone to India to stay for an indefinite period of time with Gandhi – but his beliefs compelled him to return to his homeland and stand for what he believed.

It's fashionable today to ignore one's beliefs in favor of one's behavior. After all, there are good and spiritual people who are not Christians, and plenty of scoundrels who are! Let's not worry about what you believe or who you worship and let's just do good.

"Show me your gods and I will show you your men," quotes E. Stanley Jones in "The Christ of Every Road." Your beliefs will come out in your behavior – however imperfectly you may represent them – and the kind of person you are is decided by what you believe and in whom you believe.

Colossians 2:6 says, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as LORD , continue to live in Him." As I looked at this text three words came to my mind which will serve as our outline today: Continue, Contend, and Consider.

Continue: We need to continue in rootedness to Christ.

As we first received Him, so we must continue in Him. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was writing to a group of people he'd never seen before, but he'd heard of how they came to Christ through faith and established a church in their city. He's writing to encourage them to stay with it, to keep it real and fresh.

As you first received Him. It was and is your choice to receive Him – nobody else can make that choice for you. It is a personal choice, and it's a choice that affects who you are to the very core. The word for "received" has to do with assuming an office. Let's use the office of President of the United States for example. Whoever is in that office is properly no longer called Mr. Bush or Mr. Obama, but President Bush or President Obama – even when he is out of office. The responsibilities of president become part of his persona and he's primarily not know by his name anymore... he is the President – or, "Mr. President." [I don't mean to be gender exclusive here. Someday we may have a "Madame President" – along those lines I'd like to make the first endorsement for the "Sizakele in 2044 Campaign" right now.] When you move into the office of Christian – you *become* that office – you are adopted into a royal family, and all the privileges and duties of that office are part of who you are - but not just for 4 years; it's designed to be a lifetime relationship. Just as you received Him – to the core of your being – so continue in Him.

Receive Him as Lord – the sole sovereign of your life... "No king but King Jesus!" And as you continue your life in Him, you will **overflow with thankfulness**... thankfulness. Have you ever met someone overflowing with thankfulness? Have you ever met someone overflowing with anger or complaining? One vital sign of a Christian's relationship with Christ is thankfulness.

As we live in thankfulness and a relationship that's as fresh as when we first received Him, we are *continuing* our rootedness in Him.

The second word in our outline is Contend [which I admit is implied and not stated directly]. Please read this verse out loud with me:

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.” (Colossians 2:8)

See to it that no one takes you captive... that's almost a military term. Be vigilant! Be on guard! Stay on your toes! And when you think you're paying attention, pay closer attention!

In what ways can we be taken captive?

Until I was 13, I grew up on a dairy farm. Our family farm near Wooster, OH and Bakersfield, CA have something in common – flies. We had some of the biggest, peskiest flies ever! And some of their children have followed us here! I'm not comparing Christians to flies, except for how they can be taken captive. Along with the flies, there were many spiders on the farm. They spun webs and caught flies. How are spiders able to catch flies? I think it's because the flies don't see the webs, and they fly right into them. There they are, caught, alive, until the spider comes to finish them off.

There weren't enough spider webs on our farm to suit my Dad! Oh no! He had another weapon: fly paper! Something about that stupid strip of paper would attract those flies – maybe because it was shiny, I don't know, or maybe after a while they saw all their buds there so they thought, “why not?” – and they'd come flying up onto the paper, and ... they were stuck.

When I get tired of flies on my patio I use traps. They smell awful to me, but I guess they smell great to the flies, 'cause they sure do fly in there and there they are until the poison kills them.

Hollow and deceptive philosophy can be like that. It sounds good... so... human, so chic in its godlessness... so intelligent. Yet, it's empty deception. It's based on traditions made by people and human insights instead of divine revelation. It regresses to the elementary – rudimentary exercises and babbling. That's part of the meaning of **elementary principles or spirits**.

In Paul's day this referred specifically to a belief that different angels controlled different stars and those stars controlled your destiny. Does any part of that sound vaguely familiar? How about this – have you ever heard anyone refer to “the Universe” as if it had a personality and could control your life? I

have heard people say things like, “The Universe made this happen.” I believe that certainly would be included in what Paul is talking about.

Purveyors of these philosophies do not usually ask Christians to *forsake* Christ. They’re far too crafty for that. Instead, they invite Christians to *make Christ a part of their system*. But Christ cannot be just a part – He must be the foundation and the Center. He must be preeminent.

There are plenty of spiritual and moral spider webs in this world. A lot of people are good at putting up philosophical flypaper and setting deceptive traps. It looks shiny, smells good, sounds inviting and all your friends – or the people you wish were your friends – are there. Inviting it is. It’s virtually impossible to extricate yourself from it once you’re there. Suddenly, before you saw it coming or realized what it was, you’re in the trap – you are a captive. In the Colossians’ day, as in ours, we can too easily fall prey to hollow and deceptive philosophy.

The other roadblocks to rootedness with which we must contend are worship rivals to Christ. What is a “worship rival?” It is anything that is not directly of God that we elevate to His level.

Recently Pastor Richard’s sermons came from Galatians. You might remember that the Galatian church had to deal with a group of folks known as “Judaizers” – who taught that you must observe the law, in particular circumcision, in order to be saved. They were teaching a different gospel other than Christ and Christ crucified. They were adding human good works to Christ’s work for us. Paul’s inspired response to those teaching a different gospel was, “Let them be accursed!”

Churches like the ones in Ephesus and Colossae faced a similar but more subtle and sophisticated false teaching. Instead of circumcision and the law being needed for salvation, these religious philosophers claimed that Jewish tradition and dietary laws could bring them to a higher level of spirituality, as if Jesus alone was not enough.

Of course this brought confusion to the believers there. Many were led astray and were taught, as they observed these practices and celebrations that were new to them (they were Gentiles after all), to judge others who did not hold to these ancient traditions and rituals. The problem is not that they weren’t based on truth – they were, although tradition added a greater burden to the original commandments being observed. The problem is that these customs and liturgies were being equated with the Word of God, and these words were supplanting the Word, Jesus Christ.

New moons and different days for worship, special diets and forms of worship, false humility, angel worship, and pride of “spiritual experiences” all rivaled Christ for the worship that is God’s and God’s alone. Today, it’s easy for Christians to get caught up in the personality of their favorite teacher or preacher. It’s easy to be attached to the place where you worship or your favorite ways of worshipping.

It's easy to get infatuated with current trends, ancient traditions, authenticity, excellence, relevance and causes. It's easy to allow them to overshadow Christ – after all, they are Christianly things; why shouldn't they be good?

“Holy! Holy! Holy! There is none beside Thee – perfect in power in love and purity.” So, to stay rooted in Him, we must continue in Christ and we must contend against that which stands in the way of our rootedness – hollow and deceptive philosophy of man and worship rivals to Christ.

As followers of Christ, we do well to **consider the truths found of Him in this passage.** “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” (2:9)

The reason that Christ alone must be Lord is that Christ alone is God. When the great God of the universe fulfilled His plan to save His lost creation He became incarnate in the Person of Jesus Christ - as we learned last week, as we read in the Nicene Creed, Christ is true God of true God and yet fully human: the God-man. Christ is not one of many emanations from the mysterious unknown realm of the divine. He is not co-equal with Buddha, Mohammed, Krishna, Allah, or the Universe. He is God. “We beheld His glory,” writes John in the opening chapter of his gospel, “We beheld His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Christ is God. All fullness is in Him.

We have fullness in Christ. Say, “I have fullness in Christ.” ... What does that mean?

It means that if you have received Christ as Lord, all the fullness of God that is in Christ is now in you. That doesn't mean that you're now God... but that does mean that God, through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, God, because of Christ, is dwelling in you. If Christ is Lord of your life, you don't have any less of God in you than I do, and I don't have any less than you do. All the miraculous power, all the sanctifying power, all the power to love, forgive, and overcome ... all of it that was in Jesus – and that *was all* of it, right? – all of that is in you if you have received Christ as Lord.

That doesn't mean you can walk through walls and raise the dead... It does mean that He has removed your sinful nature through spiritual circumcision (2:11). It does mean that you died to yourself through His death and live by faith in the power of God through His resurrection (2:12). It does mean that the power of God courses through you, even though you were dead in your sin and powerless to do anything other than cry out to God (2:13).

Christ is God. All fullness is in Him. We have fullness in Christ. **Christ is over all.** Look at the power that is in Christ:

- The power to forgive sins...the sins that cause me to feel a world of guilt? Yes, He has the power to forgive them.
- The power to cancel the law... the law, the source of my guilt ... the law which stood against me, reminding God of my imperfections and my unworthiness to stand in His presence. Jesus canceled the law.
- The power to turn the cross into a place of triumph. Only God could transform death into victory... victory over powers of darkness and victory over the power of sin.

“My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought! My sin not in part but the whole... is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, o my soul.”

And Christ is not only over all. Christ is all. He is the reason for and the object of true worship. All the prophecy and divinely inspired ritual of the Old Testament pointed to Christ – the fulfillment, the substance of it all. So it must be today – all else that I adore, under the Lordship of Christ. Jesus, my Lord, my life, my all... all that I hope for, all that I desire, all that I long for... it must be Christ, for if it is not, it is vanity.

Why, why do I need to stay rooted in Him? Why do I need to continue in Him? Why do I need to contend against all that would stand against Him in my life? Why do I need to consider who Christ is? The answer is in the last verse of this passage,

[the one who does not continue, contend against, and consider] “has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.” (2:19)

In God, and in God alone... there is life... all the life that I need...

About a dozen years ago now, Christina and I lived through some of the scariest moments in any parents' life. We were getting ready to go on a missions trip overseas, and my Mom brought the girls to the airport so that we could say good-bye to them properly. In those pre 9-11 days you could actually

walk with your family members and friends to the departing gate and wave good-bye out the window as the plane taxied down the runway.

I was tending to a couple of big suitcases and Christina was carrying Bu – well, she was like 1 and a half at the time – and we turned around and Sizakele, our sweet big-eyed three year old, was gone... gone in an international airport. I think most parents would begin to be concerned. We called her name. She usually came when she was called. She didn't appear. There really weren't too many places in that particular corridor she could have gone, but we weren't sure when – or where – exactly we lost her. It could have been at least five minutes. I think most parents would begin to panic. I know I certainly was. All kinds of unspeakable things began to run through my mind.

“See to it that no one takes you captive...” is a serious admonition. You could be taken, and it's not just you... we need to be vigilant for our children, and for the generations that are following them.

Elevator doors opened behind us and, Sizakele, always trying to be helpful, got on the elevator but before she could figure out what to do the doors closed in front of her and she ended up on the lower level of the airport, at baggage claim. After a few more minutes of frantic searching on the ticketing level of the airport, I tore down the escalator to baggage claim.

We were wearing matching T-shirts, which came in handy when I got down to baggage claim and shouted, “Has anyone seen a little girl with this t-shirt on?” Every mom at baggage claim gasped when they heard the question. Finally, somebody said, “She's over there by the security guard.” She was over there, although we didn't see the security guard, nor did we see the kind pretty lady that Sizakele said appeared with her on the elevator and asked if she was lost and if she could take her to a safe place.

I am thankful that our story has a happy ending. Yet, how could three adults have lost one small child in one moment of inattention?

“See to it,” Paul says.

Let us see to it that we stay rooted in Christ, that we continue in Him as when we first received Him; that we contend against all that would stand against Him in our lives, and that we would continually consider the truth about our awesome glorious Lord Jesus. Amen.