

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Rooted In Christ: Don't Be An Ingrate!" (Colossians 2:7)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/13/2011

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## **The Great Question Before Us**

In our study of Colossians chapter two, we have come to the place where we are considering this question: As individual Christians, and as the church of Jesus Christ, we need to restore and maintain a solid battle front against Satan's triple threats to the church. The question is: How are we to do it?

Satan is always active in his effort to lead individual Christians, and the church as a body, away from the truth and into worldly philosophy, into legalism, and into man-made doctrines. This is how Satan undermines and destroys churches. This is how Satan undermines individual Christians. This is how Satan seeks to rob God's people of the things that rightfully belong to them, because of faith in Jesus Christ.

And the question is: How are we to put up and keep up a solid battle front against these threats? As we begin today I want to read for you once again the passage where we find the answer to this question. I'm reading from Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse five. And here the Apostle Paul, by his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ, and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is instructing the church. Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse five:

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,

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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 taking note of the fact that in these verses the Apostle Paul tells believers that we need to maintain a united battle front against these threats. Maintain "good order and steadfastness," he says. He uses military language, the language of warfare. Take your battle positions. Man your posts. Stay in your ranks. That is the thrust of what he is saying.

### **Four Imperatives**

And not only does Paul tell us that we need to do this, he tells us how to do it. And there is only one way to do it. And we have seen that this involves four 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: “and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”

### **Five Characteristic of Growth on a Firm Foundation**

Now at the moment we are focusing on the second point: We must grow upon a firm foundation. Verse seven tells us that we must be “rooted and built up in [Christ] and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” As we have been focusing on this second point, 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, in the doctrine of Christ, in order that the believer may grow upward in Christ. We saw that Paul uses two metaphors in this verse: that of a tree putting down strong roots, and that of a building being erected upon a firm foundation.

Secondly, we saw that the believer who is growing on a firm foundation possesses stability in the truth. When the winds of false teaching blow, the rooted and grounded believer stands firm.

Thirdly, we saw that the believer who is growing on a firm foundation is constantly taking in the nourishment of sound teaching.

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Fourth, we saw that the believer who is growing on a firm foundation possesses a rootedness, an anchored position in Christ, that is an "abundant" position. If you truly abound in the faith, it will leave no room for Satan to gain a foothold. You will be able to put up and keep up a solid battle front against the enemy.

Today, we come to a fifth point, and it is this: Growing on a firm foundation results in gratitude for Christ and for the truth. Notice how Paul puts it, verse seven: "rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it *with thanksgiving*."

### **Unthankfulness: Satan's Device**

As we consider this point, I want to focus our minds on the negative implication of this verse: Unthankfulness and ingratitude for Christ and for the truth is the common failing of those who lead the church into apostasy, and it is the common failing of those who follow them. It is the basic reason why individual Christians, and entire churches, succumb to Satan's triple threats.

What are the key characteristics of this unthankfulness? Unthankfulness has its roots in pride.

It has its roots, first of all, in an attitude that says, "I know better than God." This was the sin of Satan himself in his fall, as we find it recorded in the book of Isaiah chapter fourteen, and in the book of Ezekiel chapter twenty-eight. "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God," Satan said. "I will be like the Most High." "I am a

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god," he said, "I sit in the seat of the gods." The unthankfulness that leads to doctrinal deviancy has its roots in the same kind of pride. "I know better than God."

It also has its roots, secondly, in an attitude that says, "I know better than God's Word." This was the sin into which Satan led Eve in the Garden of Eden. "Has God indeed said...?" That is Satan's destructive question in all ages. "Has God indeed said...?" The implication, being, of course, that God didn't really say what He meant, and God didn't really mean what He said. God is withholding this wonderful thing from you, Eve, because He knows that if you partake of it, "your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God." This thing is going to make you wise. So eat of it, partake of it.

And so Satan planted not only the seeds of pride but also the seeds of unthankfulness and ingratitude in the heart of Eve, and likewise in the heart of Adam who sinned with her. And the fall of man, the fall of the creation, resulted immediately from that one sin, a sin that was rooted in pride. A sin that was rooted in unthankfulness for the gracious gifts of God. A sin that was brought about because our first parents were spiritually defeated by the Devil and his deceptions. A sin that let loose all of the havoc that has plagued man and the created order for over six thousand years.

How vital it is to put up and keep up a solid battle front against the wiles of the Devil. How great a ruin can result from one seemingly insignificant sin of pride and unthankfulness. How great a ruin can result when individual Christians, or the church

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as a body, decide not to submit to Christ as the Head, when we say, in effect, "We know better than Christ." How great a ruin can come to the individual believer, and to the church, when in an attitude of unthankfulness we refuse to recognize God's Word as the sole authority, and we say, in effect, "We know better than God's Word," and we let down our guard, and we allow worldly philosophy, or legalism, or man-made doctrines to gain a foothold.

It is the great sin of unthankfulness that leads the church into error, and keeps the church trapped in error.

### **Examples Abound**

This is the great sin of Roman Catholicism. The Pope and the leaders of the church array themselves in elaborate and expensive vestments, and parade before the people. And rather than acknowledging, with thankfulness, that Jesus Christ has paid the price for sin once for all on the cross, they crucify Christ afresh every time they celebrate the Mass. Can anything be more unthankful?

This is also the great sin of the cults. The Russellites, the Jehovah's Witnesses, say that God's Word must be submitted to the judgment of man's reason. We know better than God. Mormonism goes even further and says that man becomes a god.

The word of faith preachers that you see on television today will tell you that you are a god. These men and women strut across a stage in an attitude of open and sinful pride, an attitude of unthankfulness for the gracious gifts of God in Christ, and

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they tell you that you have a right to material wealth in the here and now, planting the seeds of ungratefulness, and they tell you that you can demand health and wealth of God.

### **How Do You Know?**

Now, you may be asking this question, and we certainly need to answer it. How do you know when unthankfulness is gaining control of your heart? How do you know when unthankfulness is taking you away from the firm foundation of the true faith? How do you know when unthankfulness is gaining control of the church? How do you recognize these things?

The answer is that you must exercise spiritual discernment. In order to exercise spiritual discernment you must first of all be a true believer in Christ. You must have the Spirit of God dwelling within you.

And you must, in an attitude of true humility, true thankfulness for the gifts of God in Christ, you must rely upon the Spirit of God to illuminate Scripture for you. God the Holy Spirit is the Author of every word of this Book.

And then you need to look at what every teacher and every teaching source is telling you, in the light of Scripture. You must have the attitude of the Berean. You need to recognize when someone is using a lot of Christian terminology, but some of what they are telling you consists of things that the Word of God never said, or things that the Word of God in fact speaks against.

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You need to recognize when your own thoughts, or the thoughts of someone within the church, contradict the clear teaching of the Word of God. You need to recognize, by the light of the Word, any situation in which you yourself, or someone in the church, is falling into the trap of saying, "I know better than God" or "I know better than God's Word." You need to recognize when anyone is setting himself up as the effective head of the church in place of Christ. You need to recognize when anyone is encouraging you to set yourself up in the place of Christ, or to set yourself up in authority over the Word of God.

### **"Not In My Church"**

Now you may be thinking, "Well, these things are on the outside. This kind of attitude of unthankfulness is certainly in the liberal churches. It's certainly in the Roman Catholic church. I can certainly see it in the cults. I can certainly see it in the word of faith preachers on television. But not in me. Not in my church. Not in my denomination."

But dear friend, let me tell you, you need very much to be on guard against this kind of unthankfulness for Christ and for the truth creeping into your own heart. You need to be very much on guard against this kind of unthankfulness for God's gracious gifts in Christ creeping into a sound local church. This is why we must restore a solid battle front against Satan's triple threats to the church.

Satan does not usually begin the battle against Christ and the truth in the heart of the believer, or in the local church, by launching a massive frontal attack. No. You're

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not likely to have your pastor stand up in the pulpit next Sunday and say, "I'm going to start introducing worldly philosophy into my preaching and teaching instead of remaining loyal to the Word of God."

You're not going to hear somebody in the church say, "I'm planning to destroy this church by leading us off into legalism." You're not likely to have your church board come before the congregation and say, "We're going to introduce these new man-made doctrines in place of the doctrines we find in the Word of God." Those things may in fact happen eventually. I've actually seen those things happen. I've actually seen people become that brazen in their unbelief.

But that is not where the Devil begins. No, the attack begins in much more subtle ways. What was true in the early church is no less true today.

The book of Jude, beginning at verse three: "I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." Why? "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ."

And Paul writes this to Timothy, Second Timothy chapter four, beginning at verse one: "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 teaching. For the time will come" – count on it, Timothy – "the time will come

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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." And so what must you do, Timothy? This is going to happen. Be ready for it. "But you," Paul says, "be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

### **Pray for Your Pastor**

And dear friends, this is one of the main reasons you need to be praying for your pastor on a regular basis. Prayer for your pastor is one of the key things that you need to do, in order to restore and to maintain a solid battle front against Satan's triple threats to the church.

Pray for your pastor – and pray specifically. It's not enough to simply pray, "Lord, bless the pastor." You need to pray specifically. Your pastor is a human being. Your pastor is subject to the same temptations that you are subject to. In fact, your pastor is subject to many more temptations.

Satan loves to attack pastors, and Satan especially loves to attack pastors in these three areas. Satan loves to lead sound pastors who delight in the truth of God into the swamp of worldly philosophy. Satan loves to turn sound pastors who delight in preaching the grace of God with thankfulness, into legalists. Satan loves to turn sound pastors who are true to the sole authority of the Word of God, and thankful for it, into men who invent their own doctrines. And so you need to pray specifically for

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your pastor in these areas. You may not see the temptations your pastor is facing, and in fact, he may not realize he is being tempted. You need to pray for him.

Pray that the Lord will protect your pastor from error. Pray that the Lord will protect your pastor from the sin of pride. Pray that the Lord will protect your pastor from the sin of lack of thankfulness for Christ and His Word. Pray that your pastor will maintain an attitude of humble submission to Christ as the Head of the Church, and to the Bible as the sole authority of the Church.

### **Pray for Your Church**

And you need to pray in these ways not only for your pastor. You need to pray for this for his wife and family. You need to pray for these things for the leaders of the church. You need to pray for these things for the members of the church. You need to pray for these things for yourself, for your own spouse, for your own family: "Lord, deliver us from the Evil One. Lord, help us to recognize the subtle attacks of the enemy. Lord, help us to erect and maintain a solid battle front against the enemy. Lord, keep us thankful for Christ and His Word, and for all your gracious gifts that are ours in Christ. Lord, keep us from the sin of pride.

"Lord, keep worldly philosophy out of our thinking and out of our church. Lord, keep us from falling into the bondage of legalism. Lord, keep us from the sin of inventing our own doctrines, and our own subtle twists on the truth as we find it in Your Word. Lord, make us pure, keep us pure. Lord, make Your Church pure, keep

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Your Church pure. Lord, keep us in our battle positions against the enemy. Lord, keep us rooted and grounded and steadfast in the truth.

“Lord, keep us thankful, humbly thankful, for all the spiritual riches that are ours in Christ and in Your Word. And Lord, may we ever and always be mindful of the fact that these things are ours not because of the thinking of this world, not by any works of righteousness that we have done, not by any system of doctrine that we have invented, but only because of the Lord Jesus Christ and the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God.”

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