

Paul's Warning: Captivity or Christ (Colossians 2:8-16)

To Read:

1. Ephesians 4:1-16
2. Galatians 4:1-20

I. Introduction

A. This morning we're starting the second section of Colossians in Colossians 2:8-19

1. But, again, before we start, I want to remember what Colossians is about and how Colossians is organized
2. So, we'll start with our purpose statement for Colossians: Colossians calls us to see how truly glorious Jesus is and to root all of our hope in Him knowing that He is true wisdom to meet our every need. This will prevent us from instead pursuing the hopes and purposes of this world and being captured by worldly wisdom.
3. And the outline we're Colossians, we are looking at Colossians in four parts:
 - a. Rooted in the Gospel (~ chapter 1)
 - b. Refusing Worldly Wisdom (~ chapter 2)
 - c. Renewed in Christ (~ chapter 3)
 - d. Relational Truth (~ chapter 4)
4. Last week, we finished the first section of Colossians which contained the foundational truth of this book - the Colossians are complete in Christ and must be rooted in Christ
 - a. In the first verses, we saw Paul's Prayer: Rooted in the Gospel - Paul remind them that their hope was in the gospel and pray that their hope would continue in the gospel
 - b. In the next verses, we saw Paul's Song: Rooted in Glory - Paul sings about the glories of Christ, who He is and what He has done, and then call the Colossians to continue finding their hope there
 - c. And last week, we saw Paul's Purpose: Rooted in Christ - Paul serves the gospel to see everyone mature in Christ, to see Christ in them, the hope of glory, so Paul commands them to remain rooted in Christ, continue where they started in the gospel

B. As we continue on, this morning we starting the second section of Colossians: Refusing Worldly Wisdom

1. Having called the Colossians to see that everything they could ever possibly need is in Christ and commanding them to stay rooted in their hope in Christ, Paul is now going to warn the Colossians - he's going to share his concerns about their church with them
2. And Paul's concern is that they have forgotten that they are complete in Christ and, because of that, are ready to turn and pursue other things in addition to Christ
3. It doesn't appear that the Colossians are denying any core truths about Christ, they aren't changing the message about Christ, but they are adding things to Christ - they are embracing the wisdoms of this world to bring them to completion
4. So Paul warns them against this - they are complete in Christ, pursuing other things is worthless and vain
5. In this section, we'll see Paul give the Colossians a warning, give them a reason to heed the warning, give them some practical examples of this warning and then a theological foundation for how to live these things out
6. This week we're going to look at Paul's Warning: Captivity or Christ (Colossians 2:8-15)
7. Next week we're going to look at Paul's Examples: Root and Fruit (Colossians 2:16-19)
8. And when we return to Colossians in April, we'll look at Paul's Theology: Dead or Alive (Colossians 2:20-3:4)

C. So, let's read Colossians 2:8-19 together this morning

1. Again, you can follow along in your Bibles, or I have the text up on the screen this morning

D. Proposition: The world is trying to capture you, but you have already been captured by Christ.

1. A sober exhortation (Colossians 2:8)
2. A glorious motivation (Colossians 2:9-15)

1 II. A Sober Exhortation (Colossians 2:8)

1 A. The main warning of Colossians takes only one verse in chapter 2

1. It is a short command, but this is what Paul is really concerned about - he's worried that the Colossians have been captured by other ideas and made to serve other masters
2. And Paul doesn't want to see his brothers and sisters in Christ carried off as slaves, so after building a foundation of their hope in Christ, a foundation they can run to for safety, he solemnly warns them: don't be captured
3. And I want to consider three things about this command here in verse 8 this morning: vigilance, consequence, and discrimination

1 B. We'll start with vigilance - Paul's warning is a call for us to be vigilant

- 2 1. Paul starts with the words "See to it!" - we might translate this "watch out" or "beware" or "take heed" or "heads up"
 - a. The warning here isn't a call to passivity, Paul wants us to take action on this warning to listen to this warning and then actively watch out for these things
 - b. So the wrong way to walk out of church this morning is to file this warning away in the back of your mind to be thought about later, when you have more time - maybe not to be thought of at all
 - c. Paul sees a clear and present danger and he calls us to watch out - almost like a golfer calling 'fore!' on the golf course, or a sailor calling 'jibing!' as they are crossing through the wind - it would be the foolish sailor who heard that call and didn't immediately look for the boom and duck, he's going to end up with a headache and, more-than-likely, in the water
2. So, as we listen to Paul's warning this morning, we need to be prepared to really measure our lives against this warning
 - a. We should go home this afternoon and through this week and make a concerted and honest effort to determine if we have allowed philosophy and empty deceit a place in our lives - we'll talk about how to do that more as we go on this morning, but let's start by determining to put effort in
 - b. We need to go and take areas of our life, especially major things that guide our thoughts and our day-to-day actions, things that others might say guide our life, and really evaluate them against Paul's warning
 - c. Is this thing that is directing my life, fueling my passion, consuming my thoughts - is it rooted in Christ, or something else?
 - d. This requires a passionate desire to hear and obey and also requires some brutal honesty - can we look at our lives and be honest with ourselves about what we find? Are we willing to see what is there and change what is necessary, or will we look with blinders on and find all is well?
3. We need to be vigilant, we need to 'see to it', don't hear and ignore this warning, hear it and act on it

1 C. Next, we'll consider consequence - Paul's warning is earnest because there is a real danger involved

- 2 1. So Paul continues, "See to it that no one takes you captive" - there's an enemy army here that wants to capture you
 - a. So, perhaps the best illustration isn't the golf course or the sailing ship, Paul's warning is really like the battlefield with a commander calling out to his troops "Watch out!"
 - b. Paul literally is saying that philosophy and empty deceit can capture your souls, they can carry you off as plunder
 - c. If you allow these things free reign in your life, you're going to look up one day and find that you don't belong to Christ anymore because something else has captured you
2. And we shouldn't dismiss this danger assuming it could never happen to us
 - a. Remember that Paul is writing to those whom he has rejoiced to see the firmness of their faith, he has thanked God that the gospel came to them, he's thanked God that the gospel bore fruit in them - Paul isn't writing to those who don't know Christ, he's writing to those who in every respect look like true believers
 - b. And Paul is saying to them - watch out, if you allow worldly wisdom a place in your life, it will overwhelm you and carry you off, you'll be captured
3. This really calls us to consider - what things are ruling our lives? What things are directing us?
 - a. If Paul is writing to those who once knew and obeyed the gospel but are still in danger of being captured, we ought to consider whether we've been captured by a worldly pattern, a worldly guide
 - b. Are there things that rule over me? Ideas and principles that demand my allegiance? Are there things in this world that I cannot do? Rules that I cannot be free from?
 - c. Now yes answers to these questions aren't necessarily a problem - in fact we must have 'yes' answers to these questions because Christ ought to rule over us, our Lord does demand our allegiance, and we are duty bound and love bound to obey His command, His rule is our joy
 - d. But the danger comes when those things that rule our lives aren't vitally connected to Christ - although we're starting to tread into the next point
 - e. But we really ought to consider, what things rule over me? What things organize my life and demand my obedience? What things can I not give up? Have I been captured by anything? If so, what?

- 1 D. Finally, we'll consider discrimination - if Paul is warning us of a real and present danger, we need to figure out where it is**
1. And that really is the question - how do we tell if we're in danger of being captured by something?
 - a. This is an infinitely important question - if there is a danger that might capture us, we need to identify what it is
 - b. But also, this is a challenging question - here a spirit of judgment or licentiousness can creep in - we can be too harsh with others or too easy on ourselves, especially since there is no discrete list of philosophies we must avoid
 - c. So we need to answer this question correctly and carefully, with honesty and with love
 - d. So how do we tell the difference between good things and things that might capture us? How do we discriminate between such things? This morning, I'm going to try to answer that question by looking at what Paul describes the danger as and what Paul describes as the opposite of the danger
 2. First, how does Paul describe the danger: Paul uses four phrases to describe the danger to the Colossians
 - 1 a. Philosophy is a Greek term, it literally means love of wisdom, and it refers to sets of carefully crafted arguments
 - i. Paul's saying - don't get captured by the arguments of this world, this world will carefully craft arguments to entice you and entrap you, plausible arguments that you will want to listen to
 - ii. But don't imbibe every argument - instead, when you hear a carefully crafted argument dissect it, determine its motivation and intent, its source and its purpose to understand whether to listen or reject
 - 1 iii. Paul wants us to be mature enough in Christ that we will, as he says in Ephesians 4:14 - *we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*
 - iv. So philosophy doesn't really describe what the danger is but rather how the danger comes - the danger is in the cunning arguments of this world that will sway us and capture us if we aren't firm in our faith in Christ
 - 1 b. Next Paul calls the danger "empty deceit" - and I think this is the flip-side of the description "philosophy"
 - i. These things may be carefully crafted arguments, they may look good initially, they may be alluring and enticing, they might even sound godly, but at their heart they are full of emptiness and deceit
 - ii. And because the arguments are empty and deceptive at their core, they call us to embrace emptiness, to embrace that which is opposite to the fullness of Christ, opposite to the goodness of God
 - iii. They entice us to trade the fullness of God for a lie of this world, and they deceive us so that we can't even see that we've made the trade, we're blinded to the emptiness we've just embraced
 - 1 c. Third, Paul says the danger is according to human tradition
 - i. Every argument has to be rooted somewhere, and Paul says that the arguments that are endangering the Colossians church are rooted in human tradition, in cultural customs, in age old practices
 - ii. The lies of this world are often based on culture and tradition instead of being grounded in Christ, so we need to consider, is this argument rooted in my culture, in how things have always been done, in traditions of men or are they explicitly and clearly rooted in Christ?
 - 1 d. Fourth, Paul says the danger is according to the elemental spirits of this world
 - i. Another root for the arguments of this world are not merely traditions, but the elemental principles of this world, the way the world is organized, the things that motivate and direct this world
 - ii. Now there is some disagreement on whether Paul is simply referring to the order of things in this world, or to the demonic spirits behind these things, but I don't think that matters to much - accepting either interpretation brings us to the same conclusion
 - iii. The things that motivate the world are opposite of the things that ought to motivate a Christian, and the arguments of this world will be motivated by worldly motivations, so we need to consider, what motivates this argument, what is it's driving force and purpose? Is it Christ or is it something else?
 3. So, we get a little bit of an idea of what Paul is talking about by looking at the description, but I think we only get so far that way - I think the most important thing Paul says is what is opposite of the danger
 - 1 a. Paul says that these things are *according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ* - that last phrase is, I think, the most important phrase in this command - however we might describe the dangers, at their core they aren't rooted in Christ - that's the essence of the danger
 - b. The philosophies that may capture us are careful sets of arguments that don't start with Christ, or, more accurately, don't start with Christ as He's revealed in Scripture, and the arguments don't lead to Christ
 - c. And this is a test that we can take to all parts of our lives - how is this idea rooted in Christ? This argument that I'm listening to and considering - is it aimed at drawing me closer to Christ or simply making my life better? Is this pattern or rule something that is necessary for following Christ?
 - d. So this is the ultimate test - how is this pursuit, this passion, this driving force, this devotion rooted in Christ? The dangerous philosophies of this world will be rooted in the customs and traditions of this world and motivated by worldly motivations while the wisdom of the church must be rooted and grounded in Christ.
 - e. That's what we need to determine: how is this rooted in Christ? Is it according to Christ or listening to the world?
- 2 E. Kid's Question:** What does Paul warn them against? Being captured by worldly philosophies.

1 III. A Glorious Motivation (Colossians 2:9-15)

1 A. The bulk of our text this morning is intimately connected to the warning of verse 8, but isn't really part of the warning

1. Instead, it is more like a motivation to embrace Paul's warning - in fact, the first word of verse 9 could be translated "because" - Don't get captured by philosophy that is not according to Christ because...
 - 1a. And, unsurprisingly, Paul's motivation for rejecting the wisdom of this world is Christ (**READ!!**)
2. As we read the rest of this paragraph, I think we should hear it as a positive and a negative motivation
 - a. First, it is a positive motivation - look at all that Christ is for you and rejoice, grasp onto that
 - i. So Paul is going to uphold how great Christ is and how much He has done for the Colossians
 - ii. A commentary: "As we study these three sections, we shall discover two themes which thread their way through the whole paragraph, sometimes interwoven, sometimes separate. (i) United with Christ, believers now share in all that he has won. (ii) In Christ, believers now have all that can be theirs in this world."
 - iii. Paul wants the Colossians to see they have everything in Christ, rejoice and do not think you need more
 - b. But, at the same time, this is a negative motivation - pursuing something outside of Christ is nothing
 - i. So Paul is going to emphasize that all fullness belongs to Christ, Christ has defeated every ruler and authority in this world, in Christ we have put off the world's system and world's rule
 - ii. It would be foolish to bow down to the wisdom of this world, because it is nothingness and has been vanquished by Christ - don't seek after that which is nothing
3. So, as we look at the next seven verses, I want to see five glorious truths with Paul upholds about the Colossians life in Christ - how do you participate in the glorious wisdom of Christ?

1 B. You are completely filled in Christ (Colossians 2:9-10)

2. 1. As Paul enters verse 9 with the "because" the first thing he does is attribute all fullness to Christ
 - a. Paul is contrasting what the world has to offer with Christ - Christ is God incarnate, literally all that God possesses indwells Christ - if Christ is God incarnate, wholly and completely God, then what else could add to Him?
 - b. The answer is nothing, the emptiness of the world's arguments is literally nothing compared to the fullness of Christ - the world may offer fullness, but it is mere deception, empty deceit, nothingness
 - c. Christ is infinitely full of deity, to Him belongs all things, all fullness dwells in Christ - this is one gloriously practical application of the incarnation - literally everything belongs to Christ, everything is in Christ, there is nothing else
2. So Paul follows up with verse 10 - you have been filled with Christ, you've been filled with the One who has all fullness
 - a. All the fullness of God dwells in Christ and Christ dwells in you, nothing could ever possibly add to that fullness - no work you do, no wisdom you possess, no pattern that you follow can add to what is already in you, Christ
 - b. Instead of looking to the world to add to you somehow, you should turn and embrace all that Christ is in you
 - c. To find fullness, don't listen to the world, dive deeper in knowing, understanding, and communing with Christ
3. And, as though we needed to add to this glorious truth, Christ not only possess all things, He rules over all things
 - a. Paul finishes verse 10 by saying that Christ is the head of all rule and authority - Christ is ruler over all creation, even the spiritual forces that direct the courses of this world
 - b. And, if He dwells in you, then no other authority can bind you; you need not bow to any other rule - if Christ dwells in you, then worldly wisdom can't bind you, the powers of this world are powerless against you
4. If you are completely filled in Christ, why do you need anything else? If you are completely filled in Christ, isn't listening to the world foolishness, even a slap in the face of your Redeemer?

1 C. But then Paul continues, you are completely cleansed in Christ (Colossians 2:11-12)

1. As you read through the New Testament, it quickly becomes clear that circumcision was an oft debated topic of the early church - is circumcision necessary for the believer, does circumcision add anything to the believer
 - a. And circumcision is kind of a unique case because it was a debate about the nature of Judaism, how do the Old Testament laws apply to the New Testament believer, what are the nature of the two covenants
 - b. But, on the other hand, circumcision becomes the ultimate representative case - can anything besides knowing Christ more through the gospel add to the believer? Does something as spiritual sounding as circumcision add anything? If circumcision can't add anything to the believer, then assuredly nothing else can
2. And Paul's answer to circumcision is that you've already had a better circumcision, a better removal of dead flesh, a better cleansing because Christ has circumcised your old, dead self and removed it from you
 - a. You have been completely cleansed in the baptism of Christ, your old self was completely removed in the circumcision of Christ, you are completely part of God's people because Christ is in you
 - b. Nothing can make you more cleansed, nothing can make you more holy, nothing can make you more a member of God's people because you are already filled with Christ
3. If you are completely cleansed in Christ, why would you accept the world's demands on you? If your dead flesh was cut off in Christ, why do you listen to the world tell you how you need to be better? That's foolishness.

1 D. And then Paul works off the image of baptism and says, you are completely alive in Christ (Colossians 2:12-13a)

- 2 1. As Paul discusses baptism and cleansing, he says that your old self died in baptism in Christ, but the story doesn't stop there, not only did your old self die in Christ, the same power that raised Jesus called you back to life again as well
 - a. In Christ, you are filled with the divine life - Christ, the source and creator of all life dwells in you, in Him you are completely alive, you know the meaning of life in its fullest, in Him you have life and you have it abundantly
- 1 2. And this is all the more glorious, because in your sin and separation from God you were completely dead
 - a. But, in Christ, God spoke life back into us, God didn't merely destroy our sins, but He called us to share in His life, to partake in His being - and all of this is realized as Christ lives in us, we are alive because Christ is alive in us
 - b. Paul says it this way in Galatians 2:20 - *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.* - Christ, the author and perfecter of all life is living in me, I'm dead, but have within me all life
- 1 3. But, if you are completely alive in Christ, why would you return to the world to find life
 - a. When you were part of the world, in bondage to the elemental spirits of the world, you were dead - and that's all the world can offer you is death; death can never bring about life - for all the glamour and persuasiveness of the world's arguments, they are nothing more than death because anything not vitally connected to Christ is death
4. If you are alive in Christ, why be tempted by what the world offers you? If you were dead, but raised again in Christ, why would you look for more and better life from the world? Again, this is foolishness, a rejection of Christ.

1 E. You are completely forgiven in Christ (Colossians 2:13b-14)

- 2 1. As we enter verse 14, Paul describes how those who were dead in trespasses had been made alive in Christ
 - 1 a. And it's simple, your trespasses were set aside, forgotten, canceled by the cross of Christ
 - b. We owed God fealty, worship, obedience and reverence but instead we were rebels, refusing His rule and scorning His glory; we had trespassed against our God and king
 - c. And so we owed a debt to God that could never be repaid, a record of debt stood against us, that would stand against us for all eternity, condemning us to death and destruction and eternal separation from God
 - d. As long as that record of debt stood against us, it held us in bondage to death
- 1 2. But that record of debt was set aside - it was nailed to the cross of Christ
 - a. That record of debt needed to be canceled somehow if we were ever to be given life, so it was nailed to the cross
 - b. There at the cross the debt was paid for all of Christ's people, forgiveness and reconciliation was bought completely, there the record of debt was set aside, marked as paid, in view of the entire universe
 - c. No longer does any record stand against the child of God, as Paul says in Romans 8:1 - *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*
3. But, if that's true, why would you participate in the world's futile attempts to assuage and deny their guilt? If that's true, nothing else can add to your forgiveness. If that's true, no one has a record of debt that places you in bondage.

1 F. Which brings us to our last point: You are completely victorious in Christ (Colossians 2:15)

- 1 1. Verse 15 brings us back to verse 8 - the philosophies of this world are according to the elemental spirits of this world, the principles that this world operates under that are founded on demonic wisdom and powers
 - a. The world is bound to follow worldly philosophies, they are literally bound by them, they are captured by this philosophy and that argument, and this fad, and that movement because the powers of darkness rule over them
2. But such powers have no power over you anymore - not because you have defeated them, but because Christ has
 - a. At the cross, Christ won a victory so complete and so final that it not only defeated the rulers of this world, but it put them to open shame - it showed them to be powerless in front of Him, even in death he destroyed them
 - b. And in His resurrection, He is parading them like a triumphant emperor parading his prisoners
3. And the One who won that decisive and final victory lives in you
 - a. Literally, the world and the powers thereof have been defeated and you are free - you are not in bondage to the things the world is in bondage to, you are not bound by the things that the world is bound to
 - b. So don't bow before things that have been defeated so decisively that they are paraded in open shame
4. If you are free, why would you return to bondage? If Christ the victor is in you, why would you listen to your former captor? If you are free, the wisdom of this world can make no demand on you.

G. If all this is true of Christ and He is in you, then the world has nothing to offer, nothing outside of Christ can add to you

1. The world is offering you bondage, death and destruction; Christ has given you freedom, life and everlasting treasure
2. If we can clearly see who Christ is and if we are truly in communion with Christ then the path lies plain beneath our feet - we should be pursuing Christ, not listening to the world; we should be knowing Christ more, not searching for something else; we should be resting and reveling in Christ more; not slapping the world's wisdom on our problems
3. Christ has won the victory, Christ has set you free, and Christ lives in you - what else do you need?

2 H. Kid's Question: Why should they not be captured by the world? Because they have been freed by Christ!

IV. Conclusion and Exhortation

A. So this is Paul's main point: don't get captured by the world because you have so much more in Christ

1. Don't listen to the arguments of this world, because the One who has all wisdom dwells in you
2. Don't pursue the emptiness of the world, because the One who has all fullness dwells in you
3. Don't get entangled in the traditions of the world, because the One who has risen from the dead in newness of life dwells in you
4. Don't get entangled by the principles of this world, because the One who defeated them dwells in you
5. Again, the quote from the commentary is appropriate: "*(i) United with Christ, believers now share in all that he has won. (ii) In Christ, believers now have all that can be theirs in this world.*"
6. The wealth that you have in Christ is unfathomable and there is no wealth outside of Christ - trying to add to your life and your faith with things other than Christ is a path to nowhere, a relinquishment of your treasure in Christ

B. So we go to our lives with this question: is everything in my life according to Christ?

1. Is this principle that is guiding my life helping me to rest in Christ, or am I reaching for something else?
2. Are the regulations that I have put myself under helping me to enjoy Christ, or am I proving myself?
3. Is this passion that I'm pursuing showing me that I have nothing in this world other than Christ, or is it distracting me from seeing Christ's glory?
4. Is this thing that is taking my time pushing me into Christ, pushing me into the Word and into prayer, or is it preventing me from finding time to communion with Christ?
5. Is this distinctive drawing me to love the body of Christ, the church, or is it obstructing fellowship and isolating me?
6. These are questions we need to answer, and to answer with brutal honesty - there is always a danger that I have chosen to pursue something that is not according to Christ, something that is more in line with the world, and we must be vigilant
7. But make this a joyful question - this is a chance to root out the dead weight in your life, the weight and sin which so easily entangles, and to take hold of Christ more
8. There is no drudgery here, only the opportunity to embrace more of who Christ is - go out and take hold of Him by faith, for whoever puts their trust in Him will never be disappointed!