



Sermon – February 7, 2021
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Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 2:8 - 10

Let me invite you to open your Bibles with me. We're going to be back in Colossians, chapter 2, beginning in verse 8. And as you turn there, if you're a guest with us for the first time, whether you're here in the room or you're watching online, or also if you're gathered with us in our overflow room in the Grand Room, we just want to welcome you home. We're glad you're here. Every week we come to God's word because the Bible tells us that Scripture is living oracles. It's God's revelation to us. And we're coming with expectation today, not just to meet Him in His word, but also to meet Him afterwards in the response time at the table in the Lord's Supper. After the message is completed, I want to invite you to come down and grab the elements. But also as you do that, to pick up one of these commitment envelopes that's on the tables as well. You're going to want one of those for each family that's gathered in the room. We spent some time last week talking about God's heart for our finances. And I've been blown away by the response of our church since then. Now perhaps most clearly, the fact that y'all came back this week. That's a good sign. But no, I mean I just think of some of the stories I've heard. I know of a Legacy Adult who had already given his tithe check for the week, but came back and dropped of an additional one. Or I think about an online giver who gave for the very first time to our church this week. Maybe one of my favorites, a family, some of the kids had sold off some livestock back before the year ended. They had written out the tithe checks and I saw the dad on Sunday and he opened up his wallet and showed me that they were still sitting in his wallet because he had forgotten to deposit them back when they intended to give them a few weeks ago. And now he's got the chance to do that. The Lord is bringing His people a heart for this church in ways that are blowing me away. And I'm trusting that He's going to continue to do that in the weeks ahead. And that's one of the reasons we're coming back to God's word right here. Because if you remember, last time we were in Colossians, Paul gave us this central command in this book about walking with God. But the command now comes with a caution. There is a danger in the spiritual walk that we're called to. And we're going to see it beginning in verse 8, if you'll follow along with me in the text.

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to

Christ. ⁹For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Let's pray together.

Father, in this moment, we're praying now that every distraction would fade, every heart would be opened, and every walk with You would be strengthened. And we ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.

Alright, so what do you do when you get a phone call from a number that you don't recognize? Are you the type of person that answers it or that lets it go? For many of us, we let it go. And the reason is because we know, chances are, it's not something we're looking for. It's maybe a person trying to sell you something or to connect with you about something that you're not interested in. But also, potentially, on the other end of that phone line is somebody with even more evil intention. Not just someone who's spamming you to sell you something, but trying to scam you. And there's been surveys recently, when it comes to senior adults, over 20% of them have at some point in their life, been scammed out of money. To the tune of nearly \$4 billion the last year that they had records kept of this. You know how it works. What happens is, someone comes along with the appearance of help, but with the intention to harm. So, for example, there was a woman named Kathleen Langer up in Tennessee who, not long ago received an unexpected phone call. And when she answered, the person on the other end said that they were part of the company that manufactured her computer. And there was a piece of software that was going out of date and so they were going to issue a refund to all of the consumers who had purchased that computer to give them money back for this software that would no longer be needed. The only thing that they had to do was they needed to take remote access of her computer to help her to disable the software. You see where this is going? And so she gives them some information over the phone and they tell her, "We're going to help you disable the software and we'll get that setup." And then once they do that, "Then what we're going to have you do next is while we're logged in, we will have you log into your online bank account and that's the way we'll transfer this refund to you." And so maybe you haven't encountered that experience before, but you can imagine that concept. Someone who has the appearance of help with the intention to harm. And the way that they're doing it is by empty deceit. They're seeking to lead us astray, to take us captive because they know if they can capture our identity, they can take us captive.

When Paul speaks here this week about these false teachers in verses 8 through 10 of Colossians 2, he is giving us a similar picture. That the way that they seek to work in our lives is to lead us astray. To take us captive. To take our identity and draw us away from God's design and to live in a way that instead dishonors Him. These spiritual enemies are constantly waging war even as we seek to walk with God. So think about what's happening in this section of Colossians. Paul has given that command last time we saw of walking with God. And now he's going to show us why the road is difficult, as he speaks about the nature of these spiritual teachers. These false teachers in their midst. And what we're going to notice this morning as we work our way through Colossians 2 is that Paul is calling us to persevere in our walk with God by defending against the danger of spiritual captivity. So let's look back at verse 8 and what we're going to see first is he calls to our attention the danger of spiritual captivity. What he's showing us is that when we seek to walk with God, the Christian life is constantly in danger. And one of those

greatest dangers is through spiritual captivity. That's why he says there at the start of verse 8: see to it. He's saying beware, lookout, take caution. And what is he cautioning them about? He's cautioning them that no one will take you captive. This is a word that conjures up the imagery of a battlefield, that as two enemy armies are in opposition to each other. And they come upon a soldier who is part of the enemy. They will capture them, take them captive, secure them as a prisoner of war. There is that threat that is happening. And we live in a relatively safe city. You can go on your morning walk in Pebble Creek or Copperfield or wherever you are and you're not constantly having your head on a swivel worried that someone is going to kidnap you. But if you were to go back into ancient times, like when Jesus was alive, often the walks were much more treacherous. The terrain was more difficult. The travel was more complicated. But also the threats were more severe. You might have bandits; you might have bad guys staked out in order to try to take people captive. Not just to rob them, but to hold them for ransom. And that's the image that Paul is giving us here. That there are these people, these false teachers in the midst of the Colossians that are seeking to do exactly that spiritually. And how are they going to do it? Look at the way it goes on there. He says, they're going to take you captive by philosophy and empty deceit. There are these two ways that those that are enemies of God seek to lead us astray. Through philosophy. By shaping how we think. The way we see the world. Our whole system of belief. But also that of empty deceit where they try to change how we live by leading us astray through temptation and deception. Now we all know the big game's on tonight. And many of you are looking forward to the Super Bowl. And for some of you, you're looking forward to the game. Others of you are looking forward to the food. And the rest of you are looking forward to what? The commercials. The going rate for a commercial, a 30-second spot in tonight's Super Bowl, \$5.5 million. And they're going to use that time to try to change your minds and hearts. To have a different perspective of their product or their service. What Paul is warning us about here is that there are people in this world, spiritual forces all around us that are seeking to do the same thing to us spiritually. To change hearts and minds. To turn away from God. To no longer be captive to Christ and instead to become spiritual captives to them. That spiritual captivity comes when they try to change how we think or how we live. But put yourself in the shoes of somebody like this woman, Kathleen Langer, this grandmother in Tennessee. When she gets that call from these scammers. She doesn't know who they are. They seem like they have her best interest in heart. But what if, instead of a phone call, the way she connected with them was by FaceTime. So instead of just hearing them and believing the way they described them, she could see that as a matter of fact this was a man in a call center in the middle of India who was seeking to deceive her. She would see them surrounded by other people doing the same thing. She would know that this is not someone with her best intent at heart. She would have them unmasked and unveiled. She'd be able to see who they were and when she saw the deception, she would reject the deception.

Well that's what Paul is doing for us right now. He's peeling back the veil on how it is that satan seek to work in our lives. And what he's going to show us is that he seeks to take us spiritually captive through two primary means. Look back at verse 8. Because we'll see that spiritual captivity first can come through cultural Christianity. So the way he talks about it here is he says, according to human tradition. Now what are these human traditions that he speaks of here? Well, we're going to see them play out later on in chapter 2. But you can also go back to the gospels. You see the way the Pharisees and other followers of the Jews, their leadership passed down human tradition about certain things that you were supposed to do and not do that went on top of or in contrast to God's design for life. The closest parallel to that in our day and age is

what we often talk about as cultural Christianity. Where we keep up all the practices of what it means to be a Christian without the beliefs that underlie them. And so I imagine whether you're online or you're here in the room, that maybe you grew up in church. Maybe you walked the aisle and were baptized. Maybe you come for Easter and Christmas. Maybe you memorized lots of verses in Awana. But you're sitting here listening to this message today and in your heart of hearts you know that even though you've been doing all these things for God, you've never put your faith in Jesus. You've never trusted in Him. You've been adhering to a human tradition. That's what Paul is warning about here. That we can be taken captive from the true gospel by a cultural Christianity. And the reality is, your family can give you your last name. Your family can give you your first car. Your family can pass on an inheritance to you. But your family cannot give you your faith. Only God can do that. Only He can come and set a captive free from the kind of human tradition, the kind of cultural Christianity that Paul warns us about right here in order to enable you to make your faith your own. Paul warns us about the danger of cultural Christianity taking us captive. But look at how the verse ends.

We see this second pattern that spiritual captivity can come through cultural spirituality. That it can be built on a false spiritual foundation. That's why he says there at the end of verse 8: according to the elemental spirits of the world. Now what are these elemental spirits? The word in the original language brings up the foundational elements of something. It's like the letters of the alphabet. Or the musical notes for a piece of music. Or the numbers that you use for math. It's those core irreducible things that you can't escape. And in that time period, what they recognized, is that they were irreducible spiritual forces all over around them: these elemental spirits. Back in that day there were many gods that they would worship. And what would often happen amongst the pagan religions that were there is they would mix and match from the available options to craft a group of deities, a group of beliefs, a group of behaviors that fit them. And we may not have as many temples for pagan gods in our culture, but we have the exact same tendency. A tendency towards cultural spirituality. Where in an effort to pretend as if we are seeking to find God, we are really doing nothing more than finding ourselves. We fashion beliefs. We fashion views. We fashion priorities to fit our interests rather than submitting to His. And what happens as a result of that is that we create a god in our own image to meet our own priorities and fulfil our own desires. Paul warns us here about being taken captive by these spiritual forces. To use the things of God in a way that are dishonoring to Him. So starting next Sunday night, we're going to be kicking off our Merge Premarital Counseling. And if that's you, if you're engaged or a seriously dating couple, we still have a few spots left. But as I was thinking about our team preparing for that, one of the things I think would be super helpful in any premarital counseling is for the future married couple to have to put together a piece of furniture as a couple. So you get the box, you open it up, and I imagine if you're anything like us, one of you is going straight for the instructions and the other is saying, "Why would we need that? We've got the stuff right here. I can figure it out myself." And if that second person is left to their own, they won't follow the design, they won't look to the image, they won't try to reflect its intention, they will do their best version of fashioning it together in a way that makes sense to them that may or may not fit the intended image that the creator designed for that piece of furniture. Paul's warning us about that danger spiritually. That we can mix and match. We can put aside the image of God in our lives. We can neglect the intent of the Creator and instead fashion a god, a view, a cultural spirituality in our own image rather than in God's image. You see the danger of spirituality, like Paul is speaking of here, this spiritual captivity is that it can have all the appearance of being close to God when yet you're far off. That's the danger of a

cultural Christianity. You can appear to embody all of the cultural practices. All the things that you ought to be doing just without the beliefs. And that's the danger of a cultural spirituality. That you can have all of the appearance of believing the right things but not truly believe the gospel. And that's why Paul calls our attention back at the end of this verse when he says: and not according to Christ. He tells us that genuine Christianity offers freedom from spiritual captivity. In other words, the way that Paul is saying it cannot be more simply stated than this. You're either a captive to this world or you're a captive to Christ. There are no alternatives. And he is calling us to walk with God. So how was your walk this morning? When you look at your life do you find yourself running after God and resisting spiritual captivity or running from God and resisting submission to Christ?

Paul warns us of this danger of spiritual captivity. But I want you to watch how he goes on. Because now beginning in verses 9 and 10, he's going to turn his attention next to our defense against spiritual captivity. So notice how he says it here.

⁹For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

So how do we stand against this pull towards spiritual captivity? What we're going to find in these two verses is that Paul lays out for us three foundations that help defend against the danger of spiritual captivity. And you'll notice the first one back in verse 9 when he tells us that the first reason we can stand against the danger of spiritual captivity is because Jesus is God. So notice how he says it there: in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. So what is this fullness of deity? Well do you remember if you look back one chapter in the book of Colossians, you'll see in verse 19 the way he speaks of it in Colossians 1:19

¹⁹For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

There is this sense in which the totality of who God is and what He does has taken residence in Jesus' life. That's the reason he uses this term dwell. That all of God is in all of Jesus. Jesus is God. And that's one of the reasons that we can stand against this danger of spiritual captivity. You know 49 states in our United States have allowed indoor worship to return to places of faith like churches such as ours. The lone holdout was, no surprise, the state of California. Well, just over the weekend, on Friday night, the Supreme Court made a ruling that said that infringed on the religious liberty beliefs of those people of faith and now are allowing, are affirming the rights of those churches to meet again in person indoors. I mean, could you imagine, could you imagine, could you imagine, we're 10 months into this shutdown. Not being able to gather in a room like this, lift your voices to God, hear His word proclaimed, to be fed, to pray together, to unite as one body. That sense of isolation, we feel it all around us because everywhere we go, there's limitations on how many people can be in a room, what percentage are allowed to gather in this restaurant or this retail outlet. We are surrounded by limitations. But what Paul is showing us here when he speaks of Jesus is that when it comes to Jesus, there are no limits. That the fullness of deity is with Him. That it has taken up residence in Him. That the deity of God has come and invaded this world. It has taken residence in Jesus and I want you to notice something. When you look back at your Bible you see what it says there? It uses the verb dwells. The significance of that is that it is in the present tense. This is not something that happened in the past that is now done. The reality that the Bible shows to us is that even right

now, even as the victorious King, even as the one seated at the right hand of the Father, Jesus dwells in bodily form. He is there as our advocate, our mediator, fully infleshed in a human body just like yours and mind. And why is that significant? Well, it's like what the author of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 2 that Jesus had to become like us in every respect so that He might become our great High Priest. If He can take on flesh, He can take on our sin. If He can embody what it means to be human, if He can embody what it means to demonstrate the fullness of God, then He can ensure the fullness of our forgiveness. Paul is declaring to us that we can stand against the danger of spiritual captivity because Jesus is God. But he says even more than that.

As he goes on in this text, he shows us that Jesus is the temple of God. That all of this expectation that we see playing out in the Old Testament from where God's presence with His people has now found its fulfilment in Jesus. From all the way back in Eden when God walked with Adam and Eve. To that tabernacle in the wilderness. To that temple that took its place in Jerusalem. What he is now showing us is that the temple is here. That the presence of God is not in a building, but a body. It's not in a physical structure, it's in a physical human. That Jesus is all that it means to be God and because of that we can stand against all that it means to face the danger of spiritual captivity. But notice how he goes on here because now in the first part of verse 10 we see a second reason we can defend against the danger of spiritual captivity and it is because Jesus is enough. Look how he says it.

[and you have been filled in Him.](#)

So Paul is showing us that Jesus is the fullness of God for us and now he is showing us that Jesus is the fullness of God in us. He has taken up residence in our hearts. So how do we know that He's enough? Because we've been filled by Him. God has done this for you and for me. And one of the things that I've noticed as we get more and more electronics in our life is that, wouldn't it be nice if there was a universal connector to those devices. You ever had that situation where the battery's running low, you need a reconnection and you find a cord, you find it plugged in, and you get to the end of it only to realize that the connector that you need is not the connector that it is. It doesn't matter that that cord is plugged in to the wall. It doesn't matter that it's got that block and that cord that runs all the way there unless your connected, unless you're united to it, the fullness of the power that is available will not be experienced by your electronic device. When Paul speaks here of how we've been filled in Him, what he is speaking about is our union with Christ. The way that by faith, when we have put our trust in Jesus for salvation, we turn away from our sins and believe in Him to rescue us, we are now connected to God's presence. We are now united to Him. We now know that Jesus is enough. See we live in a world where everyone is trying to fill their life with something. Maybe they try to do it through success. Maybe significance or fame or money or connections or experiences. But have you ever noticed that each of those leads to a dead end? Maybe you're even at one of those dead ends right now. We try to fill our lives and yet all we find at the end of the path is emptiness. Why is that? Well it's because what Paul is telling us here about Jesus. That Jesus is the only one sufficient. Jesus is the only one who can satisfy. He is the only one that is enough. And if that is true, that will enable us to resist the spiritual captivity that our spiritual enemies seek to bring into our lives.

But I don't want you to miss it. Because he doesn't stop there. When we go on in verse 10, we see a third reason why we can stand against the danger of spiritual captivity and defend ourselves

against it. And it's because Jesus is king. So notice the way this verse ends. He says, speaking of Jesus:

who is the head of all rule and authority.

So he speaks there of rule and authority. Do you remember this language from all the way back in Colossians 1:16? Do you want to look back there? It says:

¹⁶For by Him all things were created whether in heaven and on earth. Thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities.

And what we found when we looked at that text back in the fall is that Paul is speaking of the spiritual forces all around us that resist God's design for this world. These spiritual enemies that stand against Jesus. And notice how Paul speaks of what Jesus is in relation to them. He's the head. Now what is the head? It's the one with authority. It's the one who is the King. The ruler. The one that reigns over all of them. And what Paul is showing us here is that if Jesus is king, you can stand against those that will take you captive. That the King will give you victory over those who are trying to take you into, as a spiritual prisoner of war. And as a result of that, what we know is that Paul is showing us that both the presence of Christ and the power of Christ work in our life to bring about the victory of Christ. That's our defense. That's our hope. That's our deliverance. You know, Kathleen Langer, as she was on the phone with this man trying to help her with her problems, didn't realize that she was walking into a trap. She gave them the information to take control over her computer. She pulled up her online bank and was seeking to login and by a stroke of God's kindness, she was unsuccessful. How many of you have ever forgotten your password when you're trying to login to your online bank account? Same thing happened to her. She couldn't remember it. The guy can't steal your money if you can't log into your account. And so then he tried to talk her into, "Well why don't you go down to the local branch and keep me on the phone while you're in there and I'll help you." or "Look it up tonight and I'll call you back tomorrow and check." So the next day she gets a phone call from a different number. She answers it, yet again. But this time it's a different voice, a different accent. And the person begins to tell her things that have happened to her over the last day that she doesn't know how anybody would be able to know unless they were involved. And so she begins to assume that he must be part of these guys that she started to catch onto now are trying to trick her. But in fact, that was not the case at all. This man on the other end of the line wasn't one of the scammers. Instead, he was an IT specialist from the United Kingdom who goes by the name John Browning. And his family, a few years ago, was duped by one of these scammers and he's made it a part time crusade to get them back. And to scam the scammers. And so what he does is he sets up a fake computer. And when he gets a scam call like this, when he gives them the information to take control of his computer, as a matter of fact what he's doing instead is somehow infiltrating their systems where he has access and control of them. And so he can, he can watch their webcam and see what they're doing. He can watch the keystrokes. He can listen in on the phone calls. And the way that he knew everything that had happened with Kathleen the day before is because he had been listening in from the United Kingdom. And so he calls her and he explains to her what's happening. And he helps her with her situation. Because what he loves to do is send information to the authorities so that they might bring about arrests. And he loves to come to those that have been taken captive by scams and to set them free. As a matter of fact, in this case, the last thing the scammers had done in their frustration is

they had put a program on her computer that locked it down. And unless you had the code, you could no longer access this thing that was yours. Your entire computer had now been taken captive. He was able to give her that code. He was able to deliver her from that captivity. When they thought that they had taken him captive, in fact, they had given him all of the access that he needed to bring deliverance to other captives.

Isn't that a bit like what Jesus did on the cross? Think with me for a minute of what happens here. Jesus comes to this world, He takes on flesh, He lives a perfect life, and He goes to the cross, taking our sins upon us, and all the spiritual forces of evil around this universe are watching. They know He's the Son of God. And yet they see Him going to His death. They think He's been defeated. We've got another one. He thought He was going to save them, but yet He has failed. But what they do not understand is in that moment where they thought that they had defeated Him, in fact death was being defeated. Because what happens three days later, He raises Himself from the grave. He shows His victory over satan, sin, and death. And what does He do now? He is here to set the captives free. Not by offering a code, but a cross. A deliverance from spiritual captivity that we can find nowhere else but in Jesus. And isn't it fitting on a day like today that we come to the Lord's table. Now as we prepare our hearts to response. Because what we find in this text is the reality that these dangers of spiritual captivity, one of the ways that God subverts them is through the regular rhythms of what we do together as a church including partaking of the Lord's table. And so once a month we gather, we come to these tables and we take of these elements. We bring them back during the response song and we invite you to participate in this family meal. If you know Jesus, if you are walking with Him as a baptized believer, this is the family meal for you. And as we do this, we are remembering the Lord's death and the deliverance that we have in Him from the spiritual captivity that Paul warns us about. And as we prepare our hearts, I want you to hear this word that Paul gives us. And then as we enter into our response time, I want you to make your way to the table, grab your Lord's Supper elements, also grab one of these commitment envelopes, and let's prayerfully reflect on what God has done for us in setting us free in Christ. Here's what it says.

[27Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and the blood of the Lord. 28Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat the bread and drink of the cup.](#)

Let's pray together.

Father, in this room or watching on this video, there may be people right now that feel in bondage to their sin. Lord, we pray that in this moment You would set them free. Lord, there may be people in this room who, even though they've tasted and seen that You are good, they have followed paths that have led to emptiness. The world has not been able to satisfy them. I pray this morning Lord, that You would help them to sense a satisfaction that can only be experienced through the fullness of God that we have now in Jesus. And as we prepare our hearts to take of these elements, to eat your, eat your flesh and drink your blood, Lord, that the body and blood of Christ would fuel us to continue to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. And we ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.