

Playing To Win Colossians 2:5-8

Vince Lombardi has been considered the greatest football coach of all time with no disrespect to other greats like Don Shula, Bill Belichick, Mike Ditka, Tom Landry or John Madden. He came in as a rookie coach in the NFL to a team with a dismal 1-10-1 record the previous year and demanded complete control of the football operations for the team. The team, the franchise, and the fans were disheartened and wondered about the future of the Packers in the NFL. After losing the first games in his opening season it's been said that he went into the locker room after another loss, held up a football and said, "this, gentlemen, is a football." From that point on he began to focus on the fundamentals of the game, drills they learned years earlier when they all first began to play. He turned the season around and ended with a 7-5 record. His career was cut short when he died of cancer, but he left a legacy that has been unequalled. After losing his first post season game because they failed to get the ball from the one-yard line into the endzone that would have won the game, he told his team that would never happen again. In his career, he won an astounding 74% of regular season games and 90% of post season games.

As we begin a new year, I want to take a page out of Coach Lombardi's play book and begin with some basics. My normal preaching has been to study a book verse by verse. Entering 2022, I want to challenge each of us to consider the disciplines that make up the Christian life and focus on our effort to strive toward growing in godly character. Today's message is a jumping off point, if you will, for what will follow. Let me challenge you with some quotes by Coach Lombardi as we consider what he says about winning in football to winning in the Christian life.

"Winning is not a sometime thing; it's an all-time thing. You don't win once in a while; you don't do things right once in a while; you do things right all the time. Winning is a habit."

"Every time a football player goes to ply his trade,

he's got to play from the ground up – from the soles of his feet right up to his head. Every inch of him has to play. Some guys play with their heads. That's O.K. You've got to be smart to be number one in any business. But more importantly, you've got to play with your heart, with every fiber of your body. If you're lucky enough to find a guy with a lot of head and a lot of heart, he's never going to come off the field second."

If you take what Lombardi said about football and apply it to the Christian life, the latter is not a sometime thing, it's an all-time thing. If you are serious about your Christian life, you will give it everything you have all day, every day, not just once in a while or when you're in the mood. It is to become a habit of discipline where you take the rulebook called the Bible and run the plays as God designed for spiritual growth and victory. Lombardi said that the successful football player will play with everything he has. He gives it his all. The same for the Christian. If we are going to win over the enemy, we must be fully engaged everyday with everything we have been given to live godly lives.

Over the next several months we will look at some of the basics of the Christian life, those disciplines that are essential as we are reminded of their importance in our overall spiritual growth as believers in Christ. On several occasions both to the believers in churches and to individuals themselves, Paul reminded them to remember the things they were taught. The basics of their early teaching in the faith built the foundation for what would follow. You wouldn't think of writing a book if you didn't first learn you're A-B-C's and then how to build a sentence through proper grammar construction. You couldn't do Algebra or Trigonometry if you didn't learn how to count and then add, subtract, multiply and divide. You couldn't play a piano if you didn't learn the notes of the individual keys and then practice scales.

My prayer in this year ahead is that together we will each grow in grace and knowledge of Christ as we apply the disciplines of God's Word to godly living.

Our message today from **Colossians 2:5-8** will be a springboard into our series for the weeks ahead. My prayer is that we won't be satisfied with mediocrity in our Christian life, that we will continue to grow in our walk with Christ, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith. One of the four core components of our mission is to grow in Christ.

Let's read our passage together.

“For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. 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.”

What I want to point out to you first in these verses is Paul's excitement.

I. PAUL'S EXCITEMENT – v. 5

How many of you have ever had or maybe still have a pen pal?

The dictionary says that a pen pal is someone with whom you become friendly by exchanging letters, especially someone in a foreign country whom you have never met.

We have a pen pal in Rwanda. His name is Muhizi. We “met” him, if you will, through Compassion International. While attending a Newsboys concert a number of years ago, we decided to sponsor a child and looked for one who shared the same birthday as David – February 7, 2005. We write letters back and forth several times a year sharing things that are happening in our respective families. He tells us about how he is doing in school and how we can pray for him.

In a sense, the Colossian believers are pen pals with the Apostle Paul. As far as we know, Paul never visited this city or this church or met its people.

Colossians 1:3-9

In **verse 4**, Paul says he heard of their faith in Christ.

In **verse 7** he says they learned this faith from his friend Epaphras.

Again, in **verse 9**, he says that since the day he heard of them he hadn't stopped praying for them. Then in **2:1** he writes **“I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.”**

He had never met them, but he wrote to encourage them to continue growing in their faith. But he also states that what he heard about them encouraged him. In the KJV Paul says he is **“joying”**, in the NIV he is in **“delight”** over what he's heard. It means to look with satisfaction at seeing or in this case, hearing about their faith. He was excited to hear about their walk with Christ. Imagine Epaphras sitting down to share with Paul about what was happening in Colossae. It would be like me telling my pastor friend in Maryland about you and to rejoice together over the spiritual progress you are making.

Epaphras vividly described the church and its people so that Paul could get a clear picture of these believers. What he heard about them excited him. Every detail Epaphras shared gave Paul the information he needed in writing this letter to encourage them to stand strong in their faith, to pray specifically for them in their godly walk, and to encourage their growth as followers of Christ.

Paul said that even though he was absent from them, he was present with them in spirit. There was a closeness, a kinship he felt with them because of the connection they shared through their common faith in Christ.

It's the same as if we wrote to our missionaries and told them we were with them in spirit. We may not be with Cassey Fleming in Papua New Guinea, but we are with her in spirit when we pray for her. We may be absent from the Janes in Thailand, but we are with them in spirit as we pray for them.

So, what did Paul have to get excited about?

He was excited about their faith in Christ. The term **“in Christ”** is a central theme of the letter and a great reminder of the position we have in our standing with Him when we trust Him as Savior. One source says: **“it’s a way of describing what it means to be a Christian and includes how all who are “in Christ” are spiritually united to and identified with Him so that all the blessings and benefits obtained by Christ belong to us.”**

Being in Christ means we are the children of God through faith. It means we have accepted the sacrifice He made in payment for our sin. God no longer sees our sin, but instead only sees that we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Our sin has been cancelled and our relationship with God has been restored.

The first thing I see in regard to Paul’s excitement is that their fellowship was strong.

A. Their Fellowship Was Strong

“For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are.”

The Amplified Bible gives us a correct understanding of the term **“orderly”**. It’s a military term, something Paul uses quite often in describing their solidarity. The Amplified translates the term orderly as shoulder to shoulder. Paul likens the believers here as a military unit drawn up in battle formation standing side by side as they face and resist their enemy together. The word can also mean to be unbroken or intact.

Who among us hasn’t played the game Red Rover? How that game got its name I can only guess other than to think it rhymes with the taunt. You holler “red rover, red rover send Johnny right over.” Johnny would start off with a steam and try to pick what he thinks is the weakest part of the other team where arms have been linked together. The object is to try and keep Johnny from breaking through the line. If they did, Johnny joined their team.

As Paul listened to Epaphras talk about this church he concluded that there was a strong fellowship and unity among them that helped them link their arms together in defense of one another as they stood shoulder to shoulder against the enemy. That’s what strong faith in Christ will do with good fellowship.

Where there is no unity, there is no fellowship. Where there is no fellowship, there is no unity. Where there is no fellowship or unity the church will break apart.

Unity was an issue Paul had to challenge the church in Corinth about.

I Corinthians 1:10

He also wrote to the church in Rome.

Romans 15:5-6

It was also an issue Jesus prayed about for His disciples and for all believers to follow.

John 17:20-21

Jesus prayed for unity among the body of Christ so that the world could see and believe the message about Him as Savior.

If there is one thing that does more damage to the testimony of a church, it is when people within the church don’t get along. An unbeliever will take note and conclude that they don’t want to be a part of a group that can’t get along. Satan will do all he can to disrupt unity in the church and Paul was excited to hear that they stood shoulder to shoulder. Folks, our fellowship must be strong to stand against the attacks of a relentless enemy. When that happens others will see a commitment to what we believe as we endeavor to link arms in defense of one another.

Paul was excited because their fellowship was strong.

Second, Paul was excited because their faith was strong.

B. Their Faith Was Strong

“For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how firm your faith in Christ is.”

Again, Paul draws from the military with the term **“firm”** or **“steadfast”** depending on your translation. It means to make steady, to have a solid front or to be immovable.

Paul uses the word as he concludes his thoughts to the Corinthian church about Christ’s return and the victory we have over death and the grave. Until Christ comes back he writes **“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” (I Corinthians 15:58)**

Peter uses the term telling believers to be self-controlled as they stand against the devil who acts as a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. They were to stand firm in their faith even in the middle of suffering. He concludes by writing: **“And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” (I Peter 5:10)**

Paul was excited about what he heard from his friend because it was their faith in Christ that was the glue that held them together; it was their faith in Christ that was the bond that made them stand firm, to be immovable and it would be their faith that would unite them in solidarity against attacks from the enemy.

As a church, let us continue to build up our faith as the body of Christ so that we can face attacks through a united effort.

A strong fellowship and a strong faith were two characteristics of this church that Paul got excited about. He used terms like orderly and firm because of what he is about to encourage them in and warn them about.

II. PAUL’S EXHORTATION – vs. 6-8

The first exhortation is in **verses 6-7** and speaks about how believers should heed their walk.

A. Believers Should Heed Their Walk – vs. 6-7

The word **“walk”** or **“live”** refers to conduct and character or how we live. **“So then”** or **“therefore as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live or walk in Him.”**

The word **“as”** means in the same manner as. Walvoord and Zuck write: **“The Christian life continues as it commenced: ‘just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him.’”**

In other words, our journey as a Christian began with faith and it must continue to be lived in faith. **Hebrews 11:6** says that faith pleases God.

Something that we will see in a moment when we get to **verse 8** is that false teaching was being introduced in the church that told them they should add additional teaching to what they had learned to help them mature spiritually. But Paul tells them to keep practicing what you were taught from the beginning of their journey of faith. They didn’t need additional teaching from other sources that said spiritual growth comes from doing extra things.

Paul tells them to hold onto what they had already received about Christ. They didn’t need anything extra. The word **“received”** means to join to one’s self or take to one’s side or receive by instruction. In other words, live by or cling to what they were taught. Paul wanted their life and conduct to be in harmony with what they were taught by Epaphras.

Look for a moment at **chapter 1** and Paul’s prayer for them.

Colossians 1:9-13

Paul was praying that these believers would be filled with the knowledge of God’s will **IN ORDER THAT** they might live a life worthy of the Lord to please Him in every way, to bear fruit in every good work, to grow in the knowledge of God so that they would be strengthened with all power that would provide endurance and patience in the Christian life resulting in giving God thanks who has given them an inheritance in His kingdom having removed them from the kingdom of darkness.

If you want some homework for this week, read each of Paul’s letters and jot down the qualities that

should be evident in the life of a Christian as he or she endeavors to please God. Then jot down the things Paul says should be absent from the Christian if he or she would please God.

For example, read **Colossians 3** or **Ephesians 4-6**. Or read **Galatians 5:22-23** and ask yourself if you exhibit the fruit of love for others, or joy in spite of trials or peace in the middle of life's storms or patience when provoked. After you have your list, use it as a mirror to see how you are doing, to see if your character and conduct please the Lord.

Let me add this thought, the tense in the Greek is that this is a continuous action. Every day we should be maturing or growing in character that reflects more the nature of Christ.

Paul then tells us how we heed our walk. The first is to grow deep - be rooted in Christ.

1. Grow deep - be rooted in Christ

We all know that the deeper the roots, the more stability the tree has to survive storms that may otherwise uproot the tree. I read that what you see above ground in an oak tree is the same depth and breadth of its root system below ground. The deeper the roots are the stronger the tree is. The deeper the roots are, the more nourishment the tree receives during times of drought.

Psalm 1:2-3

The tense of the word "**rooted**" means that once for all you have been rooted. Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest writes "**Having been rooted with the present result that you are firmly anchored.**" In other words, once you are rooted you won't be a tumbleweed. When your faith is anchored in Christ, you won't be blown around by every wind of doctrine that comes along. You will be able to discern truth from error and live by the truth, not swayed by the opinions or pressures of others. Instead, you will stand on your convictions because of what you were taught and what you believe to be true from God's Word.

Ephesians 4:14

Let me say one more thing about being rooted and for that I want you to think of the mighty Sequoia trees. Their roots don't grow down, they grow out

and intertwine with the other trees around them. That shows me the importance of connecting with other believers who are also rooted in Christ so together we can stand in unity, strengthened by the faith of others in Christ.

Not only are we to grow deep, but we are to grow up.

2. Grow up – be built up in Christ

Where growing deep is an action in the past that continues since a tree is a living organism that keeps growing, growing up is something takes place in the present and continues into the future. For a building that is being built floor by floor, it needs to begin with a firm or solid foundation. Any other foundation than Christ is unstable. Paul reminds them that their foundation is Christ and on that solid foundation the believer can continue to grow because its integrity will never fail. The point Paul wants to convey here is that as the Christian continues to grow in His faith, he looks more like Christ in character.

3. Grow in – strengthened in the faith you were taught

It literally reads "**constantly being established with reference to your faith.**"

I know you are thankful for the heritage of truth on which this church has been built; for the godly foundation of pastors committed to teaching the uncompromising truth of God's Word without hesitation or apology.

Warren Wiersbe adds that "**Christians who study the Word become established in the faith.**"

Acts 17:11 says that the Bereans studied the Word of God to determine if what Paul was teaching was actually true from God's Word.

4. Grow out – overflowing with thankfulness

Someone who grows deep, grows up and grows in will grow out. They will have a thankful heart. The word picture Paul uses is a river that is overflowing its banks. When we are rooted and built up in Christ and strengthened in our faith, we will be thankful. The more we grow, the more we come to realize all

we have in Christ and comes through Christ that we had nothing to do with and we will be grateful.

Paul says in **Romans 1** that the result of being unthankful is that the person's thinking becomes futile and their hearts are darkened and foolish.

The exhortation of Paul to believers in **verses 6-7** is to heed their walk. When we learn to grow deep, grow up, grow in and grow out, believers can heed his advice in **verse 8** to heed their world.

B. Believers Should Heed Their World – v. 8

In this verse the warning is to watch its teaching and its traditions – both would lead them astray.

- 1. Watch its teaching**
- 2. Watch its traditions**

The word philosophy is a compound word
Phileo – the love of
Sophia – wisdom

Philosophy is the love of wisdom. Paul isn't here condemning all philosophy, but only philosophy that would lead the believer astray. He's talking about the principles of the world that are false and worldly.

There was a growing teaching known as Gnosticism. Some Gnostics taught that a Christian could do whatever he wanted, indulging in anything they desired because he was forgiven. Indulge the flesh. This was known as antinomianism. Other Gnostics taught the other extreme known as asceticism which taught that the Christian should deny himself of every kind of pleasure.

False teachers posed a real threat to the church and Paul didn't want them to be led captive by what he called hollow and deceptive teaching. The word **“captive”** was a common term used when someone plundered a ship for its cargo.

The fundamental problem with a lot of philosophy is that it isn't aligned with the gospel. It blends some teaching of the Bible to make it sound good, but weaves in other false elements. That's what the serpent did in the garden with Eve, tricked her using a false philosophy. You can well understand Paul's

exhortation to be rooted and built up in Christ, strengthened in the faith they were taught by Epaphras so that they would stand firm in their faith. What these philosophies were teaching was a trick meant to deceive and lead astray.

In addition, he tells them to beware of traditions that can also lead astray. Jesus dealt with that issue on more than one occasion with the Pharisees who taught that following the traditions of man around the law were more important than following the law. A believer who is grounded in God's Word won't be taken captive. He will be watchful and wary of what the world teaches that is false.

Before jumping on board with movements that sound good and seem to be based on some biblical principles, really look into their core beliefs and line them up with Scripture. For example, followers of Hare Krishna say they believe in God and prayer and loving others, but which God and to whom do they pray. People, know the truth to stand firm and not be led astray.

The false teachers Paul is warning about wanted these Christians to believe their teaching was lacking and that they had additional truth to pass on to help them mature. Paul said, hold on, go back to what you were taught from the beginning and cling to that teaching.

The Christian life is fraught with all kinds of hazards that want to trip us up and take us captive. My prayer as we consider some of the elementary disciplines of faith in the weeks ahead is that we will be better grounded to grow this year in our faith in Christ.

Taking what Coach Lombardi said and applying it to being a Christian, it isn't a sometime thing, it's an everyday thing. If we are going to finish well, every inch of the believer has to be engaged all the time. If we don't want to be the kind of Christian that comes off the field, we need to be in the game with a lot of head and a lot of heart for Christ.