

The Oxford Dictionary annually chooses a word of the year, which reflects the mood or ethos of that particular year. For 2016 they chose the word “post-truth,” which describes the perceived social/political climate where objective facts are less influential in the formation of opinion than appeals to emotion and personal beliefs. As Christians living in this environment, we must hold firm to the Bible, which we believe is the ultimate truth. We are called to be faithful to Jesus and the gospel, and not be turned aside by appealing deceptive arguments. The Colossians were also facing a culture in which deceptive philosophies threatened to pull them away from living out the fullness of Christ. So Paul’s council for the Colossians is therefore also relevant to us today.

In today’s passage, Paul is calling Christians to be faithful to Christ by guarding against deceptive human philosophy. Verse 6 begins with the phrase “so then,” referring back to 1:23-2:5, which describes the importance of firm faith in Jesus, which should derive from an understanding of the supremacy of Christ as described earlier in chapter 1. If we understand Jesus’ supremacy and know the importance of standing firm in faith, then Paul calls us to continue to live in Him. We must submit our will, our emotions, and our lives to His supremacy. Jesus, who is the basis for Paul’s apostleship and for our relationship with God, is before all things, created all things, made His kingdom available to us through His redemptive work, is the head of the Church, and is the mystery of God. Everyone who received Him should live accordingly and continue to walk in Him. Our daily conduct should reflect the gospel. Right belief should motivate right behavior. To walk in Jesus means to be united with Him. We are in Him and He is in us. We are the branches and He is the vine (John 15). The branches cannot live and bear fruit apart from Him.

As we walk, we must be rooted in Him and built up in Him (v. 7). Paul uses agricultural and architectural metaphors to describe how we must be grounded in Christ in order to grow. Ephesians 2:19-22 describes us as materials built into a temple of God, with Christ as the cornerstone. The idea is that we must be strengthened in our faith by being grounded in the full knowledge of Christ. And this should lead to overflowing thankfulness. A grateful heart is an

indicator of a solid foundation in Christ. Even when we experience difficulties, the knowledge that God is in control and the perspective of the gospel should give us a heightened awareness of God's work in our lives, which should make us thankful. Even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we don't have to fear because God is with us, guiding us (Psalm 23). Is your life characterized by gratitude towards God?

Verse 8 tells us that this firm foundation in Jesus helps us counter false teaching. He tells the Colossians to be aware and vigilant of attacks on God's truth. Often these attacks are unexposed or tolerated. But we must watch out for the teachings that come between us and the experience of the fullness of Christ. The philosophies in Colosse were more of a folk religion than philosophies popular in Athens, like Stoicism and Epicureanism. They were instead a mixture of Hellenistic culture and Jewish mysticism that created a worldview that explained man's relationship with a deity. These philosophies could be powerful. Paul warns that they could take people captive. This is a military metaphor. These philosophies invade people's minds, carry them away from Jesus, and enslave them. But they are hollow and deceptive. This is similar to modern advertisements, which tell us that buying products can fulfill us. The source of these ideas is both human tradition and elemental spiritual influences, which refers to demonic influences. Although in America we aren't exposed to cults that much, in China it is not uncommon for college graduates to give up everything to follow cults. There are no doubt some demonic spiritual forces behind this. Maybe for us this comes in the form of astrology, or even the prosperity gospel, which stems from materialistic and individualistic cultural values. We can also see these influences in secular pluralism and relativism. We are a diverse society, but we must not waver in the conviction that God's word is absolute truth.

Finally in vv. 9-10 Paul deals with these false teachings not only by pointing out their demonic nature but also by reminding us of the fullness of Christ we already experience. Christ is sufficient. John 1:16 tells us from Jesus we received grace upon grace. After all Jesus has given us, why would we turn away to follow after empty useless things? If you ate a full lunch, then there is no more room for dessert, even though it is enticing. Jesus is above all power and authority. Even Satan is subject to God, who placed him under Jesus' authority. So as we face all the troubles of the world, we can stand firm in the fullness of Christ, who is above all things and whose love for us endures forever.