

Last year, I was speaking at what is probably the largest pastor's conference in the US. There were well over ten thousand people there. I tend to not stick my head in to often to listen to the other speakers there. I just do it when I can, according to the schedule they have me on. I stuck my head in on two speakers before I was going to go on. He was giving talk to pastors basically revolved around this idea of "Are you a guardian or are you a gardener?" It became very apparent in his talk that he was saying we are to be gardeners, we are to cultivate the gospel and make those things look beautiful, we are to cultivate and garden well. He said this guardian thing is this outdated, cold, silly idea that you have to stand guard over anything. His point was that we are to be the gardeners instead. We help things grow. Even then the illustration is flawed, because even the gardener weeds out the weeds. In the end, I'm listening and I'm thinking to myself, "Yeah, that's good. Garden or guard, which one do you want to be? You want to be a gardener. You want to cultivate, you want to help people grow. You don't want to be the guy who just stands in front of the garden and says, 'You're not allowed in. Be careful of this. Watch out for this.' And then he starts talking about how the gospel is like one of those plants in the garden, how the gospel has to be nurtured and fed. And near the end of this talk, he says, "Now I wish I could define gospel for you, but I can't define the gospel for you. The gospel can only be defined within individual communities." The second he said it, I snapped out of it and went, "That's why we need guardians. That's why somebody has got to guard the gate, because of ridiculous stuff like that, where what has easily been defined for thousands of years is now being called into question." So now this guy is going, "Okay, the double imputation, when Christ takes on our sin and we take on His righteousness, that's not the gospel. The gospel has to be decided by you and your individual community." And now there's relativity being introduced into what historically has not been relative at all. It has always been, "Here's the truth. Here is how God has revealed Himself in Scripture." And now all of a sudden there's this, "No, you define it how you want to define it and we'll define it how we want to define it." And I was reminded why we need guardians.

So my fear often for all of us at the Village as well as outside of the Village in Evangelicalism at large is it seems that, as long as there are good intentions, it is somehow wrong to call out false belief, because the heart might be good or because God might use such broken wickedness to draw somebody unto Himself. So I cap on the Prosperity Gospel constantly because it's wicked garbage. That's why I cap on it. Every time I say something like what I just said, I'll get some well-meaning e-mail from somebody who says, "Well what if God uses a guy or a ministry like that to draw men and women unto Himself?" There are a couple of things about that. First, I have no doubt that God can save using that. We have instances in the Scriptures where a jackass talks and men get right with God. So I'm not saying that can't happen, but I'm saying the damage done by that to the people in there who never get turned on to the true gospel because of the fake one isn't a good exchange. And I would also say that I have known people who became believers in Christ after a tragedy that rocked their world view, and I don't know that we want to start a ministry of murder here or a ministry of car accidents. Maybe we do, and to be honest, there have been times here, as your pastor, I have gone, "A ministry of murder would be awesome," until the Holy Spirit convicted me and I had to repent.

With all of that said, we're going to get into Colossians 2 because Paul is addressing false teachings that is going on inside of the church. So let's look at Colossians 2, starting in verse 1. "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one

may delude you with plausible arguments." You don't get far with crazy most of the time. So if someone in your home group says, "Jesus was actually a woman named Jessie," then nobody really goes, "Tell me more about that." People go, "Oh, you're crazy," and they move on and talk about what's true. But it's when arguments sound plausible that our faith can be weakened because it might sound right.

I'll give you an example that has just been a recent example. I was watching Larry King Live when Jennifer Knapp, who is the former Dove Award winning artist who recently came out of the closet, is saying, "I'm a Christian lesbian now." And then on with her is Ted Haggard, who pastored a church about our size; they just met on one sanctuary compared to our three sanctuaries. He was a guy who was actually fired after it was found out that he bought meth from a male prostitute, and after that there were some other indictments that came out about some other things that had happened before that that were covered up by the church. Let me just say this for the record. You will not have this problem here at the Village. We tell our guys, "If you sin publicly, you'll be handled publicly." So there won't be anybody who just goes the way of Jimmy Hoffa. There won't be this, "Hey, what happened to that pastor?" If one of our pastors falls into sin, it will be dealt with in a manner that you will know exactly what happened and exactly what our attempts are to restore that person. But there were cover ups that were in Haggard's life before the one he actually got busted on. So when that came out, the church had to explain that. And then there was poor Bob Botsford. I don't know anything about him. I just know that he's the conservative Evangelical, historic orthodox perspective on the show. And they're debating homosexuality. So my point here is not homosexuality, but the plausible arguments that begin to occur on Larry King Live as they talk. At one point, Ted says to Bob, "What you don't seem to understand, Bob, is that you're on your journey, I'm on my journey and Jennifer is on her journey." Now this is a plausible argument. It makes everybody feel good. It really makes everybody feel better to not have to say, "What I believe is right, and what you believe is wrong." Right now, we are as Evangelicals not comfortable with that, because it makes us feel as though we are doing exactly what Haggard and Jennifer Knapp were accusing Christians of doing, which is being divisive for divisiveness sake.

So here's what I want to do with that plausible argument. I want to take it and put it under the same scrutiny that Christianity is put under in those interviews. They're not really interviews. It's not like Bob Botsford has been petitioning against homosexuals his entire life. It's not like his entire ministry is about condemning homosexuals. The reality is that he was invited on Larry King Live to talk about the issue from his position. It was not that he was on some crusade to deny homosexuals of their rights, but that's always how it's painted. That interview was tired. It was worn out. I've seen it four hundred times with just different people. But if you take what Ted said and what Jennifer said and begin to put their arguments under the same scrutiny that Christianity is put under, they don't pass. They are plausible arguments that fall short. If we could take their arguments and break them down, they fall into two categories or two systems of thought.

The first system is that doctrine doesn't matter. So what we believe doctrinally, what our systems of belief are, they just simply don't matter. We're all moving toward the same God, we're all headed towards the same God, we're just on separate paths to get there. Now that sounds very cute, it sounds very warm and it's like a nice warm blanket on a cold day. "Oh, praise God. The Jew isn't going to hell. The Muslim isn't going to hell. The Pagan is not going to hell." So everybody gets to feel comfortable. But here's where it becomes problematic. Just ask the person who says that to tell you about God. If they say there is a God, then the question is, "Who is that God?" More likely than not, what you're going to get from them in this day and age is that God is some all-loving spirit in the sky. Now here's the great irony of that. That is a doctrine, a belief system about God that actually goes contrary to almost every religion in the world. The Buddhists don't believe that there is a personal God. The Jews, the Muslims and the Christians believe there is a God who holds us accountable for our actions. So here is a doctrine about God that views itself as more enlightened than all the other views on God. So they become and do exactly what they are condemning our boy Bob on Larry King Live of doing.

If they don't take that path with it, they take another path that is just as silly. They take the path that there is truth, but nobody can know all truth and we all just have pieces of the truth. So once again, everybody feels comfortable and everybody is warm because parts of what you believe might be true, parts of what I believe might be true and parts of what they believe might be true. And we all have this section of truth, but nobody owns all of it. Once again, that sounds great until you put it to the test. What you'll notice is that they then view that belief system that nobody holds all truths and that nobody can know all truths to then take away from another person's truth claim. So you end up using your belief that truth isn't knowable to tell someone that their truth isn't knowable. So you go, "I've got part of the truth, and the part of the truth I have is that what you believe isn't true." In this instance also, you're simply being the very thing you're condemning in the Evangelical. It really is silly, and here's how it erodes our confidence, how it deludes our belief system. If we watch that on Larry King Live, we begin to lose confidence at our ability to approach the unbeliever and say, "Let me tell you the good news of Jesus Christ. Let me tell you what God has done for you in Christ. Let me tell you how you can be reconciled to God and how life can be had to the full." Our confidence is robbed because, "What our neighbor believes is what our neighbor believes, and that's good for him. Christianity is great for us." But it's not plausible. It is a fine sounding argument that does not work. So it's not crazy. It's not, "Jesus was a cucumber," but in the same way it still takes away from the majesty and might of God and does the very thing it's condemning in the Christian, which is the most frustrating part of all those interviews. Over and over again, the framework that the Christian is being attacked for is the exact framework that those attackers are operating out of.

So he's going to say here that there are false teachers among you. He uses different language in different places. He calls them wolves, he calls them dogs, he calls them pigs. We have teachers among us at the Village, not on staff but those in home groups who will speak up and they will say things that simply aren't true that sound plausible. And where we have identified that, where we have had loving conversations with those men and women about the falseness of their teaching and they've said, "I don't care what you say. I don't care what the Bible says," we have kindly asked them to no longer attend here. Once again, we are being guardians so that the garden might grow. So in that way, the speaker nailed it as long as the guardian protects the garden.

I want to move on from there and jump to verse 8. "See to it that no one takes you captive. . ." That's an interesting line there. He's saying, "See to it that no one makes you a slave or hauls you off, takes you from what is right and good and takes you to a place where you would be a slave." "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy. . ." Now I want to stop there and say that I don't believe that Paul is anti-philosophy. I think this is a direct word play. This is a jab at the false teachers in the church of Colossae who called what they believed "the philosophy." So he's not contrary to philosophy. In fact, Paul himself unpacks philosophically and theologically what the gospel of Jesus Christ is and how it should look in the life of the believer. So he's not so much anti-philosophy as he is questioning their philosophy.

And he begins to unpack their philosophy like this. "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit. . ." Once again, you have to keep this in mind. Plausible arguments that could lead you astray or lead you into slavery have at their root empty deceit. Let me give you an example from inside the church. There was a real practical, pragmatic movement that swept through Evangelicalism in the 70's and 80's. Instead of preaching and proclaiming the nature and character of God, instead of saying, "The Scriptures are about God. So let's learn the nature and character of God and go from there. Let's learn who we are and then who God is and how we need a Mediator and a Savior," instead of the emphasis being the nature and character of God, it became pragmatics. It became, "Let me show you how to be a good man. Let me show you how to be a good husband. Let me show you how to be a good wife." So you started getting what I call "combination sermons." They're called things like, "Seven Ways to Remove All Fear and Doubt From Your Life." So it was like if you turn to this text, and then turn to this text, and if you did this, then the thing would unlock on you. They were very practical, pragmatic, application oriented sermons where you would walk through that. Now my problem with that is that you can do all that is commanded without the transforming work of Jesus Christ, without the

transforming work of the Holy Spirit. You don't get free from doubt regardless if you memorize verses about not having to doubt. If what you know is not God Almighty, the sovereign of the universe and that He's doing and why He's doing it and if He can be trusted, if you don't know that and grasp that, your seven steps to remove doubt will only serve to reinforce your doubt. So he's going, "One of the ways that your faith is deluded is by philosophies that have at their center empty deceit, things that sound right but in the end are empty. They are promising a fullness that they do not deliver.

And then he moves on from there. "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition. . . ." Now, this phrase "human tradition" is used only two other times in the New Testament. It's used in Mark 7 in regards to the Pharisees and it's used in 1 Peter and there is some debate as to whether or not he was addressing Jews there also or whether he was addressing Gentiles. But basically here's what he's talking about. He's saying, "What's being taught is of human origin. It is not divine in its origin. It does not come from God; it comes from man." So it's empty in that it cannot deliver what it promises, and its origin is not the God of the universe and is a man-made teaching. It is human conjecture on how things might work. It is the pooling of ignorance, which I'll talk about more later on.

"See 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. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him. . . ." Let me talk a bit about the "elemental spirits of the world." We are grandchildren of the Enlightenment. So we are very linear, very mathematical. C.S. Lewis would say that there are two great errors when it comes to the demonic. One is paying too much attention to it. So one error when it comes to demonic activity is to think that everything is the devil. So if you get a flat tire on the way to work, it's not because you ran over nails but because the devil was trying to get you. People do that all the time. There's a demon under every bush, and everything that goes wrong is a demonic attack. They just live in this constant fear of the demonic. But the other error that Lewis said people make is to pretend that it doesn't exist, to ignore it altogether. So where some cultures around the world are very aware of demonic and angelic forces, our culture is one who has made the error where it's not talked about and we pretend it doesn't exist. If there's any issue at all, it's medical, it's chemical, it's mental or it's tied back to this incident or this behavior, and there's no longer any consideration at all given to the demonic, how you handle the demonic. He's saying here that these teachings that are empty and deceitful, these teachings that weaken and delude the faith, these teachings that are built upon a philosophy that are not sustainable and cannot deliver on what they promise have as their motivator demonic forces. He is addressing people inside of the church. He's saying that the drive, the gasoline, the motivation behind this false teaching is actually the demonic who wish to delude the faith of the saints. That's the warning.

Now he's going to very generously give us how we combat that. Let's look back at verses 5-6. "For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him. . . ." There is a difference between our modern understanding of belief and actively walking with Jesus Christ. He's referencing belief and relationship. It's not just a methodical affirmation of belief systems. It's not a checklist of beliefs. It is, "We believe and we walk in that belief." There is a relationship component to our belief. So we have a relationship with Jesus Christ where there is prayer, where we listen, where we hear, where we apply, where we submit and where we are obedient to Him. We walk with Him, which attacks the notion that what God wants from you is your church attendance on Sunday morning. You have been reconciled to God in relationship with God through Christ. So the command here is, "Don't let anybody delude you." How do you not do that? You walk with Jesus Christ.

And then I want to point out what he says next and make an appeal and send you to our website. “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him. . .” So we walk with Him, but we’re also rooted and built up in Him. You live in an amazing day to be alive. Information is at the touch of a button away. Some of you have at your disposal with your phone more theological information and answers than the generations before you could get in weeks. You have an unbelievable amount of information at your fingertips that can help you grow into a knowledge, help you be rooted and established as you walk with Jesus Christ or even serve as a resource for you in a moment where Ted says to Bob, “Hey, I’ve got my path and you’ve got yours, and that’s okay.” We have resources, and we’ve tried to turn you on to some of those guys. John Piper and his website, www.desiringgod.org. I think every manuscript for the past thirty years is on that site. Posted on our blog right now, we’ve lined it out, including links to podcasts, links to Amazon.com where you can buy certain books. All of that is available for you. All you have to do is get online and click and look. If you’re not a good reader, I have even included a DVD set by R.C. Sproul called Foundations where you can just simply look at some of the foundational elements. Because in the end, I don’t think you need to be a brilliant theologian or a guy who can handle all areas of apologetics. You do need to know the cross well. In fact, what the philosophy is teaching at the church in Colossae is that there is needed than the cross of Jesus Christ. So if you can nail down, “Christ takes my sin and I get His righteous,” you’re way ahead of the curve. So anytime you listen to another teacher, there are a couple of questions: where is the cross in their teachings and what does this teaching do to the cross? So if someone is saying, “It is the cross and _____. So the cross saves you, but in certain ways it’s insufficient. So this is how you make up for those insufficiencies,” then you immediately know they’ve strayed outside the bounds of orthodoxy. Or if there is no cross and it’s all built around your effort, then once again you know they have strayed outside of orthodoxy. We have swung as a pendulum outside of where we need to be to walk in life and peace and the things Christ came to bring for us. So all of that is online waiting for you.

“So walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith. . .” I’ve always loved and now I like preaching this one now more than I liked preaching this before my seizure and before the prognosis. Because in walking with Jesus Christ and in being rooted up in what the scriptures promised in Jesus Christ, when the storm came my family and I were established in faith and our circumstance does not dictate to us where our joy is, which is unbelievably powerful. Because you don’t control your circumstances as much as you think you do. So in seasons of joy, He is amazing, great and gracious. And in seasons where things are difficult and painful and you don’t know which way is up and which way is down, you are what the book of Hebrews would call “anchored.” This goes back to what we said a couple weeks ago where it’s this reality that you build on the rock and when the storm comes, your house doesn’t knock over because you built on a solid foundation. Whereas if you build on the sand or deluded, weak faith, then you have a tendency to be washed away.

And then if you look at that last line, here’s where all of that leads. “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” So because you know who Jesus Christ is and you have a relationship with Him, you go through your day praying and listening, as you’re rooted and theologically know what is sound, as you understand the sovereignty of God, as you understand evil and suffering and how things flow through God’s hand and you begin to grow in an intellectual knowledge of who God is in the Scriptures while walking emotionally and intimately with Him. You can’t just pick one of those. You can’t say, “I’m going to be the intellectual one” or “I’m going to be the emotional one.” You don’t get to pick one of those. The moment you do, you’re in error. I saw this all the time in college. There was a group that would go, “Why can’t we just love Jesus? Why does all of this matter?” And then there was this group that would go, “Well this is why all this matters.” So one was cold and the other was flaky. I constantly wanted to go, “Christ has not commanded that you would be cold, and Christ has not commanded that you would be stupid. This isn’t what God wants for either one of you. In fact, you guys should probably hang out more than you’re hanging out so that what is good and right in them might rub off on you and vice versa. And we might have brilliant, theologically aligned, godly rooted, established

believers who feel deeply." So walking like that leads to an abundance of thanksgiving. So where you don't have those things, then that amount of thanksgiving begins to wane.

I've got a beautiful wife. I'm grateful for my wife, and I abound in thanksgiving about my wife. My wife is not perfect. She could have a long conversation with you about my imperfections, but there is an abounding amount of thanksgiving in my heart towards Lauren for several reasons. Almost all of them tie back to Jesus Christ. God clearly says in the Scriptures that he who finds a wife finds what is good. The Scriptures are saying that's a gift to me from God and that gift is about my sanctification. God gave me Lauren to sanctify me, to reveal in me my selfishness, to reveal in me how much I'm about me, to reveal in that relationship who He is and how gracious He is, how wonderful He is. My children have been given to me for that same reason. They are a gift from the Lord. I am to impart to them the wonders of His name, and they are going to teach me how selfish I am and how much I'm in need of a Savior day by day.

Just to be frank with you, this has been a very difficult week. I feel like I've been boxing all week long. At the prayer meeting on Wednesday night, we're praying and talking about some issues that just happened and some very difficult decisions that are being made. And then we started talking about the fact that a lot of pastors deal with that week in and week out but don't deal with the amount of salvations that we see here, don't deal with the amount of men and women who are getting very serious about the Lord. So we have all these great stories that go along with difficult things where a lot of pastors just deal with the difficult constantly. And they're working as hard as they can, they're doing all that they know and they're not seeing anything like what we're seeing in regards to conversions and people getting serious about the Lord. So even in our difficulty, we began to really rejoice in who God is and began to abound in thanksgiving because we haven't been deluded and we understand, are rooted and established, walking in Jesus Christ why the world works in certain ways. Or if we don't know why it works in certain ways, we're able to trust and walk in faith as He has proved Himself over and over again to us.

So here's my appeal to you. My appeal is that you would be very diligent in growing in your knowledge and wisdom, that you would be very diligent about growing in your rootedness in Him, that you would be very diligent about walking with Him, that you would be very diligent about knowing Him, that you would be very careful how you view the Scriptures, how you view Recovery, how you view biblical counseling, how you view those things. Because here's the empty deceit part. If this is a book that's primarily about you, if biblical counseling is primarily about you, if Recovery is primarily about you, if you're going into Recovery to make an issue go away, if you think that reading the Bible is going to make these things go away, then I think you've already set yourself up for a lot of disappointment. I think you go into Recovery, you go into biblical counseling, you go into the Scriptures going, "I want to know who the God of the universe is, how He works, how He functions and how He sees me." When you do that and walk in that, I think that's when you start to walk in real freedom. It's not when you identify this one idol that you want to crush, because in the end that tends to get replaced with pride or arrogance if you're able to combat that. But most of the time, people come out the other side of the program and go, "They didn't work." What I want you to hear me say is that their purpose wasn't to magically fix you. Their purpose was to point you and introduce you to the God of the universe. And my hope is that that would be our pursuit and our desire.

Let me pray for us. "Father, thank You for our time together. Thank You for these men and women here today. I know that there are those among us who are what Paul would call wolves. They are not believers. They wander from church to church creating division. And their hope in the deepest part of their heart is to lead astray those who are faithful, to confuse and to contradict what is right and what is true. So my prayer is that you would reveal those men and women to us so that they could be removed from the garden before they destroy the vine. Then my hope for those of us who are just not rooted and established in You is that we would take very seriously understanding You, who You are, who You have been viewed as historically, that we wouldn't buy into the lie that somehow scholars today are able to exege

the Bible better than it's been exegeted for two thousand years starting from the day it was written. So help us not be deceived and give us eyes to see. My hope, Holy Spirit, is that You would give us a genuine desire not birthed out of guilt, shame or works, but that You would give us a real passion to know You, see You, be able to explain You, be able to spot what is false about you, not so we might wield a bat against anyone, but for the good of our own souls and the protection of our family and friends. Help us. We need You. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

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