

Col. 2:4-15, First Discussion of our Practice as Believers
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H. Van Dyke Parunak

Overview

1. Three themes in 1:21-23
 - a) 1:21-22, our Position in Christ
 - b) 1:23a, our Practice
 - c) 1:23b, Paul's ministry
2. 2:4-4:1 works out the first two themes, chiastically. The Practice sections are marked by imperatives, and also make reference to the believer's Position in subordinate clauses.
 - a) 2:4-8, Practice
 - b) 2:9-15, Position
 - c) 2:16-4:1, Practice
3. The close intermingling of these two themes is a characteristic of the epistle, and indeed of Paul's thought.
 - a) Evidential condition in 1:21-23
 - b) 2:6 "as ye have received ... so walk"
 - c) 2:20, 3:1 "if ye be dead ... if ye be risen ..."
 - d) Position/Practice chiasm in 3:5-14
4. 1:23 suggests two aspects of practice that we shall see repeated in both of the Practice sections:
 - a) Continue in the faith grounded and settled: positive (need for godliness)
 - b) Not moved away from the hope of the gospel: negative (warning against false teaching)
5. In 2:4-8, Paul discusses both the negative and positive sides of godly living, first indicatively, then in inverse order with specific commands.

A. 4, Neg Indicative

They are in danger of being deceived with plausible arguments, overwhelmed with words by the false teachers. This is why Paul has written what he has just said. His words in 1:24-2:3 guard against their deception by establishing his authority as the bearer of the true mystery.

Application: The Devil can outtalk any of us. The presence of persuasive arguments for a position does not make it right. Our decisions must be based on the Word of God and the guidance of the Spirit.

B. 5, Pos Indicative

Paul rejoices as he imagines to himself their order and the steadfastness of their faith. In his mind's eye he sees them as he wishes them to be. These qualities would naturally result from the condition described in 1:23, "grounded and settled."

1. Their Order: as in 1 Cor. 14:40 ("decently and in order"), refers to the discipline of their church life together. For the opposite, see 2 Thes. 3:6, 7, 11, the busybodies who refuse to support themselves. Their *conduct* is in keeping with their position.

Relation to being "grounded and settled": a building with no firm foundation shifts, cracks, and falls down. Outward orderliness manifests a solid foundation underneath.

2. Steadfastness of their faith toward Christ: he imagines them holding fast to the Lord Jesus, not doubting his sufficiency or seeking other provision. Their *belief* is in keeping with their position.
3. *Application*: Two millennia before computers made "telepresence" possible, Paul has a "ministry of virtual presence" here, 1 Cor. 5:3 (joining in a matter of church discipline), and 1 Thes. 2:17. Though he is not with them physically, he contemplates them in his times of prayer before the Lord, sometimes exercised over their shortcomings (as in 1 Cor), at other times rejoicing over their victories (as here). We need to learn to be present with people "in spirit" (here, 1 Cor) or "in heart" (1 Thes) even when we cannot be with them in the flesh.

C. 6-7, Pos Imperative

Now he commands them to live as he has just visualized them. Note the allusion in v.6 to their position in Christ, which will be developed more fully in 9ff.

1. "Rooted and built up" combines two metaphors: agricultural and architectural (though "rooted" was commonly used metaphorically of buildings and cities: see Lightfoot).
 - a) "Rooted" looks at the foundation (described with the architectural metaphor in 1:23 "grounded" lit. "founded"), and is Perfect, describing an accomplished fact.
 - b) "Built up" considers the higher stories, which manifest the "order" of 2:5. It is present tense, an ongoing activity (as are the other verbs in this verse).
2. "Established in the faith and abounding in it in thanksgiving."
 - a) "Established" (cf. 1 Cor. 1:8 "confirm") has in view our continuance in our faith in Christ "unto the end" (1 Cor. 1:8, where the word is rendered "confirm").
 - b) "Abounding in it in thanksgiving."
You show lots of faith, associated with thanksgiving to God. The result of continual conscious appreciation of what God has done for us in Christ.

perisseuw with *en* phrases (Not in Sermon)

- 1) These examples show three forms with the same case structure: Y is optional.
 - a> A "Your X abounds in Y,"
 - b> B "God causes X to abound toward you in Y"
 - c> C "You abound in X in Y."
- 2) In any of structures, Y can be something that
 - a> 1 enables the abundance in X,
 - b> 2 characterizes X,
 - c> 3 comes along with X.
- 3) Rom. 15:13 "abound in hope, in the power of the HS" (2x); C1. The HS enables you to have abundant hope.
- 4) 1 Cor. 15:58 "abounding in the work of the Lord"; C, no Y.
- 5) 2 Cor. 3:9 "the ministry of righteousness abounds in glory" A2. Your abundant ministry is glorious.
- 6) 2 Cor. 8:7 "as you abound in everything ... faith, utterance, knowledge, diligence, love"; C, no Y.
- 7) Eph. 1:8 "[his grace] which he caused to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence"; B1 (if the wisdom and prudence are God's), B3 (if they are ours: we have abundant grace, adorned with wisdom and prudence).
- 8) Phil 1:9 "that your love may abound ... in knowledge and in all judgment"; A3, your abundant love is associated with knowledge and judgment.
- 9) Phil. 1:26 "that your boasting may abound in Christ Jesus in me through my coming again toward you". "In Christ" is associated with "boasting," not "abound." A1, my return will occasion your abundant boasting.
- 10) Col. 2:7 "abounding in faith in thanksgiving"; C3, faith associated with thanksgiving.

c) *Application*: Two signs of a personal walk in Christ: persistence unto the end, and thankfulness to God.

3. Hypothesis: the three pairs of 1:23; 2:5,7 correspond.

- a) The former draws on architectural metaphors and concerns the assembly as a whole.
 - 1) 1:23 "grounded" lit. "founded," corresponds to 2:7 "rooted," the foundation in Christ;
 - 2) 2:5 "order" corresponds to 2:7 "built up," the structure of the higher stories.
 - 3) For the whole, cf. Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-6.
- b) The latter is psychological in nature and concerns the state of each individual in the assembly.
 - 1) 1:23 "settled" in its only other two NT occurrences (1 Cor. 7:37; 15:58) describes firmness of purpose or conviction.
 - 2) 2:5 "steadfastness of your faith" and 2:7 "stablished in the faith [cf. Heb. 13:9] and abounding in it in thanksgiving" both are applicable only to a person (who can believe), not an organization.
- c) *Application*: The health of an assembly rests on two things: the condition of each member of it, and the orderly relation

of the parts to the whole as a manifestation of the body of Christ. Each of us as an individual must be settled, steadfast, established and abounding in our personal relation to Christ. The assembly as a whole must be an orderly structure resting directly on the LJC (and not on any intermediary such as a denomination or human tradition).

D. 8, Neg Imperative

Warning against the danger of becoming a prey to the false teachers. "Spoil you" is too mild; the idea is not just that they lose their property, but that they themselves are carried away captive.

1. How can this happen? "Through philosophy, that is, vain deceit." He does not condemn all search for knowledge; indeed, that is the honor of kings (Prov. 25:2). But search for knowledge that is not subject to God's word is empty (because void of firm content) and deceptive (because it leads people away from that Word which alone is Truth).
2. The next three phrases describe this philosophy in more detail.
 - a) Its *source* is "according to the tradition of men." If the standard is not Scripture, what is it? Answer: human tradition. The two are in continual tension. NB: Often (Judaism; PB's), these traditions take their origin in a desire to keep close to scripture. But when we do something because our fellows do it, rather than because we are compelled to it by the Word of God itself, we are under tradition.
 - b) Its *content* is "according to the rudiments of the world." "Rudiments of the world" appears again in 2:20; Gal. 4:3, where it describes the basic principles or instructions by which false religions seek to achieve salvation. The genitive qualifier "of the world" is critical; Christianity has its "rudiments" as well (Heb. 5:12; 6:1-2). The "world" is the sinful system opposed to God, the hierarchy in which one person seeks to control another, the "spirit of antichrist." It uses religion as a means of control, and to that end makes salvation depend on works. When we follow such a system, not only do we abandon the only true way of salvation, but we place ourselves under the control of others, thus allowing them to make a prey of us.
 - c) Its *defect* is that it is "not according to Christ." It does not conform to the revelation that God has given us in his Son.

Analysis

This paragraph contains the only imperatives not in the "application" section. Generated by two oppositions: the positive and negative themes described above, and indicative vs. imperative.

A. Neg Indicative: Purpose p

1. Text: Tou^to le/gw
2. Purpose: i(/na mhdei\s u(ma^s paralogi/zhtai e)n piqanologi/a|.

B. Pos Indicative: Concessive p

1. Concession: 2:5 ei) ga\r kai\ th^| sarki\ a)/peimi,
2. Text: a)lla\ tw^| pneu/mati su\n u(mi^n ei)mi,
 - a) xai/rwn kai\ ble/pwn u(mw^n th\n ta/cin kai\ to\ stere/wma th^s ei)s Xristo\n pi/stews u(mw^n).

C. Pos Imperative: Manner p

1. Manner: 2:6 (Ws ou)^n parela/bete to\n Xristo\n)Ihsou^n to\n ku/rion,
2. Text: amplification
 - a) Summary: e)n au)tw^| peripatei^te, [Imperative]
 - b) Amplification: 2:7
 - 1) e)rrizwme/noi kai\ e)poikodomou/menoi e)n au)tw^|
 - 2) kai\ bebaiou/menoi th^| pi/stei kaqw\s e)dida/xqhte,
 - 3) perisseu/ontes e)n eu)xaristi/a|.

D. Neg Imperative:

- 2:8 ble/pete mh/ tis u(ma^s e)/stai o(sulagwgw^n
1. dia\ th^s filosofi/as kai\ kenh^s a)pa/th
 2. kata\ th\n para/dosin tw^n a)nqrw/pwn,
 3. kata\ ta\ stoixei^a tou^ ko/smou
 4. kai\ ou) kata\ Xristo/n: [Imperative]