



Christ Over All

Part 3 – Don’t Get Swept Away or Led Astray

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Turn in your bibles to Colossians 2 as we look at *Don’t Get Swept Away or Led Astray*. Today, we’re going to jump right into Verse 1 as we turn a corner. Chapter 1 was all about Jesus, the foundation of our faith and Jesus, the head of the church. He’s the Cornerstone as we just sang as a church.

Now, we are going to turn the corner and Chapter 2 is all about warning. It’s all about staying with the foundation of Jesus, not moving away from the foundation of Jesus. So, this week and next week... This week is don’t be swept away by the hollow philosophies of the world. Next week is don’t allow works to be what you think leads a person to salvation and don’t allow works to be the priority of your faith; remain with Jesus as the priority of your faith.

Colossians 2 - **I want you to know how hard I am contending for you...** Today we are talking about fighting for the faith of others. Your translation may say *struggling* – I’m struggling for you, I am making it a priority, continuing to fight for you and for your faith. This church has always been about fighting for the faith of the next generation as well. In the front here, I see so many young people. As we were worshiping, I kept thinking to myself, *we are ready to hand the church and the leadership of this church over to the next generation*, aren’t we, Greg? There is one senior on the front row here. And it’s starting to happen. As I looked around... We will continue to contend and fight and struggle for the next generation’s faith.

He says, ...**I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea...** This was a letter that would have been read by the Colossians and by those at Laodicea, which was about 11 miles away. He says, ...**and for all who have not met me personally.** He says, “I’m even contending for the faith of people I’ve not yet met.

As parents, we are a church that contends for the faith of our children. I know many in our church have been through difficult seasons where children have been led astray or swept away. They’ve said, “We raised them in church, we raised them in a Christian home, they came to know the Lord at a young age, but now, Ted, I fear they are being swept away and following hollow philosophies of the world.”

Today, as we look at the first 10 verses of Chapter 2, we are going to be contending for the faith of our young people, of our children, and for those who call the Ozarks home.

I remember a few years ago, I was invited to speak at the Kansas Beef Summit. Think about just the Kansas Beef Summit. I'm like, *Of course I'm doing that. I have no idea what to offer, but I'm going to the Kansas Beef Summit in Overland, Kansas.*

They asked me to speak on marriage and family. I took my daughter, Corynn. We got there a little bit early and I was able to hear the first couple of keynotes. The first one didn't grab my attention because it was a veterinarian speaking on respiratory issues of cows and I ain't got a lot to offer and I don't even really need to know a lot about that. But the next guy that spoke was unbelievable. Corynn and I were riveted to this guy's talk.

He was a professor from San Diego, and this was his talk. His talk was called *Marketing Beef to Millennials on Facebook*. You'd think that was a boring talk. Well one, he was an excellent communicator and he was contending for the beef industry. He said a lot of things. I can't give it all to you. I wanted to start my talk off with that Jim Gaffigan joke where he stands up and says, "I'm a vegetarian. Do we have any vegetarians in the room?" I'm curious, do we have any vegetarians? There's not one vegetarian at Woodland Hills Family Church.

I wanted to say, "Hey, are there any vegetarians in the crowd?" and then you get somebody to raise their hand and you say, "Well, I'm not a strict vegetarian; I eat beef and pork." But this guy stood up and he was passionate, right? He said a couple of things. He said, "One..." And I find this fascinating. And he had all the research to back this up. He said, "Millennials don't eat beef until they start having children. Then when they start having children and raising families, they become the largest consumer of beef because it's cheap and fast to cook."

Well, they are not the first to come up with this. I grew up on something called Hamburger Helper. We had it every other night. Can I get an amen on Hamburger Helper? I don't eat that, and I wish we went back to it. And then he said this, and I about fell out of my chair. Now, you have to picture the crowd. Do we have any farmers or ranchers in here? Were you part of the Kansas Beef Summit? Are you from Kansas? No. You don't want to participate in this part of the service. I won't make you participate. But I drove my little rental car into Overland, Kansas and I was the only little four-cylinder engine pulling in. Every truck in the parking lot was a F350 King Ranch.

So, that's the crowd. It is 60 and 70-year-old ranchers sitting there with their arms crossed. The reason this guy was speaking was there was a documentary that came out about the unethical treatment of cows and it was hurting the beef industry. He was trying to help them have a better image. The young people that were with... It's like the sons of these cattlemen got it and they were like, "Okay we've got to do this."

He said this, and I think it's one of the best lines. He said, "Millennials will eat beef so long as they know the cow has lived a good life before they died." Now, I don't know why that strikes me as so funny. Then he painted a picture. He said, "Once they saw the image of you herding your cattle onto trucks with forklifts, that hurt the industry." Here's the image the millennials are looking for. They are wanting two cows for every 10 acres, white picket fence, they want you to name the cows. And I think wagyu is where they drink beer and you massage them. That's going a little too far for me. I don't need my cows

massaged. He said they want two chickens, two ducks. You could just see the attitudes of all the people watching this guy. But he was passionate. I love passion. And he was contending for the beef industry. I looked at my daughter and said, "This is awesome!" I'm already a client. I'm like a twice a day client of this guy. He doesn't have to worry about me; I'm fully in. I eat way too much beef. But he was contending for the... And he was trying to get them to understand the mindset.

I walked out going, *Man, we need more of that in the church.* Not beef eating, but people contending, people fighting. Sometimes I get worked up when I'm up here and I apologize and then people start texting me, "Stop apologizing! Go at them!" Get after it, contend for it because we want you to know we're far more passionate about the Gospel of Jesus than we are about beef. And if someone can get passionate in contending for the beef industry, church, it is time we stand up and get passionate for the souls of our children and for the souls of the next generation. And that we don't get lost.

Here's what I want to talk about a little bit today. That we don't get caught up in a lot of the side issues that are causing the next generation to say, "I don't want anything more to do with that church, I'm out of here."

This week, I sat down because we're getting these emails from different ministry groups saying, "You're going to see one of the largest exodus of pastors and church leaders from the church in the next 12 months because of this pandemic." And criticism is at an all time high. It's why I love what we just sang, "On Christ a solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand." We are rooted in Christ. We are built up in Christ. We are encouraged in Christ. No matter what comes at us, no matter who comes at us, we will stay grounded in Christ. But pastors are leaving, worship leaders are leaving. I've heard this for a while now.

Joshua Harris is probably one you've heard of. I wrote a book called *Young and in Love* that kind of went against his message of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. Then he recanted that book, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. As a pastor of 17 years in Maryland, he walked away not only from the church, but from the faith and said, "I would no longer call myself a Christian." Lots of pastors have done this, lots of worship leaders have done this.

So, I sat down this week and I wanted to hear their testimonies, I wanted to hear their stories. I didn't want the articles written about their stories and I didn't want to hear the commentary or the video blogs about their stories. I wanted to see their body language, I wanted to hear why they walked away from the church. Why did they walk away from faith? It's not just "I had a bad church experience," it's "I'm done, I no longer consider myself a Christian."

I was looking for the common thread. Through all of that I just had a yellow pad as I watch video after video. I encourage you to do the same. This is just my observation of what I heard. You can do your own investigation into this and we are going to talk to you about how to be careful with that. But as I watched it, it kind of hit me. This is the common thread, this is like the message that I'm hearing out of these worship leaders and out of the pastors, and this is my paraphrase of what they said, "I'm walking away from a distorted version of Christianity." Some of them said, "I'm walking away," and then they

came back a couple of months later with, "I know what I said, but I want you to know I'm still seeking. I'm still pursuing a relationship with the Lord, but I just can't do it in the context that it's been in.

There are about three categories underneath this statement that caused many of them to walk away from the faith.

Christian culture – Christian culture is how I would describe it or define it; it is our passion for the non-essentials. We say the essentials... Travis Brawner, one of our elders, does a class on this at our church. It's what we believe, it's what we just sang. Those are the essentials of our faith. It's the non-essential that people get so worked up over and get so passionate about and, if I can say, we get goofy about it, we get weird about it. You understand there is a level of Christian weirdness out there today. You understand that. It's outside of scripture and outside of relationship. It's just Christian weirdness.

If you've ever watched John Crist comedy, he's made a living off of making fun of Christian culture. And you laugh at, you share it because it's true. And now that list of non-essentials has grown even larger. But many of them have stepped away from the stage. I just want to tell you... Those in ministry will let you know, the lights, the stage, the fog is not good for you. It's not good for your soul. And many of them said, "My living is tied to my faith, so if I'm going to leave this and I don't want to do this anymore, it just seems like I'm going against what I believe."

This is why in two weeks, Lance Witt... I hope you plan on being here October 4. He is a friend of mine, a pastor for years under Rick Warren, but he's my counselor. He has spent a lot of time with me. He'll be here leading a retreat for us, but he has a ministry called *Replenish*, where he helps people step off the stage because the image management and the pace at which people run with that destroys their souls. And he helps them get back to healthy soul care so they don't have to abandon their relationship with Jesus to do that. He's going to be here speaking to our entire church. But many of these leaders that I watched this week should have stepped off the stage, but they didn't need to step away from their faith.

Culture Wars – This one... It was fun in the 8:30 to watch people shaking their heads at me during the service. I looked out at people I love and care for and have pastored for over a decade when I make some of the statements I'm about to make. I'm here to tell you... We're not marketing beef to millennials on Facebook, we're contending for the faith of the next generation. They are exhausted with the way we are fighting politically. I heard it in every single one of them. Do you want me to quote Joshua Harris for you? He said, "Evangelical support for Donald Trump is incredibly damaging to the Gospel of Jesus." There are people in here right now shaking their heads. And there are people on the front row nodding their heads. Can you hear that for just a moment? Can we pause with that for just a second? Joshua Harris said this, but I have friends in here who would put their name with that.

In 2016, I did a message called *NOTA, None of the Above*. I didn't like the choices I had to vote for president of the united states. I was very clear about it. It was the Sunday before the elections. It was the most watched sermon in Woodland Hills history. I stood up here and I said, "I am pro-life, I am for protecting the unborn, and I'm for a traditional view of marriage." I went through the issues and I said, "I don't like a lot of what I have to do in this election." I'm going to encourage you as your pastor to vote. You have to vote. That's a key in this election. I personally will be voting. It's a single or a double

issue campaign. I'm voting for life and I'm voting for marriage, but I'm still praying that the Lord will bridle Donald Trump's tongue. I still pray that. Some of you are like, "Ted, we all know who you're voting for." Yeah, I can vote for a man without gushing over a man. Can I say that again? I can vote for a man without gushing over a man. There are people applauding right now and there are people that hate my guts like they've never hated it before. But we're contending today. I want you to put it in the perspective of your children. I have teenagers now. And the conversations I have sitting around the diner table with my teenagers are different than I had when they were five years old. They're like, "Dad, we know what you've taught us, we know what you say you believe. Now, I just want to see if that's really how you live. You've taught us about leadership. Do you believe everything you've taught us about leadership and is that still true for leadership today?"

I want you to vote. I want you to vote your conscience. Some of you right now, I just want you to hear there are many young people today who are like, "We're moving away from Christ as the message and Christ Over All and being rooted in the church, and we're putting too much hope in a political platform." I still say what Adrian Rogers said, "Christians should not choose between the two." We need to stand above the two parties. Why? Because we need to be able to call both out in the sin that exists in both. That's Adrian Rogers who is with the Lord now. He was the pastor at Bellevue Baptist Church. You start quoting people when you feel like you're losing the crowd. Quoting people of greater stature than yourself. I just need you to know that. I had to win back a few southern Baptist right there for just a second. But Christ is over all and please hear me, follower of Jesus, Christ is over Donald Trump. Christ is our Savior, not Donald Trump. Christ is our Savior, not the Republican party. I have great peace going into the election. I will cast my vote.

My dad sat in the 8:30. I had to let him know not to worry. My dad took my son and daughter out to dinner Friday night and when they came back, we were having prayer afterwards. All four of us were on Amy and my bed. Carson goes, "Whoo, we had a lot of political talks tonight, Dad." My son is 15. I go, "Yeah? Are you and Papa aligned politically?" He goes, "We're pretty close." With that, my dad can die and go be with the Lord now. So long as he knows his grandson is a republican, he can die and be with the Lord.

But I want my kids to know I'm going to vote, I'm going to be involved in political decisions and government decisions, but it will never be my savior, never. Some trust in chariots, some trust in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. A lot of these leaders have left because of... I wouldn't say evangelical support of a candidate, I would say evangelical gushing of a candidate, and I would go even to some, as one of our teaching team members just texted me – "How about evangelical worship of a candidate?" Christ over all. I just wish... I don't know if you can see it now as you sit in here, but I wish you could see the nodding and the shaking going on at the same time. People are leaving over that.

The church – Many of them said, "I got burned in the church." "I got hurt in the church." I just have to tell you that if you have to leave a church... I've worked with many people through this because of a toxic environment or because of abuse by a leader in the church. Leave a church, find a new church, but don't leave Christ. Don't leave being rooted in Christ.

I grew up in an independent, fundamental, pre-millennial, King James Version only Baptist church. You've heard me say that I don't know how many times. I spent my freshman year in an independent, fundamental, pre-millennial, King James Version only Baptist college that no longer exists. I remember about my freshman year saying, "I love the Lord – I came to the Lord at a young age – but I'm done with all of this. I can't do this anymore. So much of what I've read, I'm not seeing. So much of what we get passionate about is our application out of here but is not central to here." I remember the resident director. I was a resident assistant, leaving this college. My last lunch at school, I sat my tray down and he said, "You know, Ted, one day somebody is going to knock you upside the head with a two by four, and I want you to now you've got it coming." I remember going, "Okay..." I picked up my tray, went and sat at another table, and I walked out that day and I left it all. I just couldn't deal with it anymore.

I went to Liberty University and had a relationship with the Lord rekindled like it has never stopped being on fire for. So, some of you may have to walk away. I just want to encourage parents today because you hear this all the time. "Ted, what do we do to keep our kids from being led astray or swept away?" Parents today are concerned that their children may drift away from the faith, but our first concern should be that we don't raise them in a distorted version of Christianity, that we don't let them see the politics being the most important thing to us. The church is the most important thing. Jesus said, "The gates of hell will not prevail against it. Nations rise and nations fall, but the gates of hell will not prevail against us." That we don't raise our kids in the non-essentials. We don't raise our kids in environments that say... No, we raise our kids saying Jesus Christ is the center. This is the goal... That was Verse 1, 18 minutes of the message.

He's contending for the faith and a lot of times when you see people say contending or fight for, what are they thinking? It's time to get the pickets signs out, it's time to fight, we're going to battle. He said, **2 My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding...** Complete understanding is so important because what we are going to see today is that people get swept away, they get led astray by hollow philosophies because they start to say, "This is not enough." Or they are around a distorted view of Christianity and they're like, "There's got to be something more." I get this all the time from people.

I shared it a couple of years ago, but when that Bible was going around the country leaking oil? Some of you don't know what I'm talking about. Exactly. But people came to me saying you've got to come see this Bible. I'm like, "I'm good. I've got one. And it's God's word." And I believe in the sufficiency of scripture. I believe in the supremacy of Christ, the sufficiency of Christ, and the supremacy of scripture and I don't ever want to be this Christian that is constantly looking for something else outside of it to appease me or to make me more complete.

He says complete understanding. In what? ...**in order that they may know the mystery of God...** Christian, do you want to know the mystery of God? Do you want to know the mystery of his Word? It's really simple. His name is Jesus. ...**namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.** **4 I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.** By the dazzling words that people can present to you.

We just had the debrief between 8:30 and 10:00 and some were sharing that. They were saying how they Google something or see a video and think *that really sounds good*. And that's coming from a Christian author. Why does it sound good? It's because the Gnostics of this day were Bible believing, but they mixed in Greek philosophy and they mixed in oriental mysticism and they brought other stuff. ***5 For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.***

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him... This is important. Follower of Jesus, the gospel is not just for lost people. We sometimes think that. Present Christ crucified, Christ rose from the dead, that is the message you give to lost people so they can become Christians and go to heaven. It's not just for lost people. The gospel is for believers too. That you don't just come to Christ with the gospel, you continue in Christ with the gospel for by grace you are saved through faith. Next week, we're going to see this key. It's not about works; you don't come to Christ through works; you don't have faith in Christ through works. Works are the overflow, not the source of your salvation

7 ...rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. One of the best ways, Mom and Dad, to make sure your children are rooted in Christ is to make sure everything we say and do right now is rooted in Christ and is the priority.

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. I love how Eugene Peterson paraphrases this in The Message. He says, "You don't need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ and the emptiness of the universe without him."

9 For in Christ... This is very important because remember the Gnostics in that day... We looked a little bit last week, they denied the deity of Christ and so Christ is not part God, part man, but fully God and fully man. **...all the fullness of the Deity lives...** a powerful statement for the false teachers and those being led astray by the false teachers in that day. **...in bodily form...** fully human. Verse 10 now is how do you and I fit into that? **10 ...and in Christ you have been brought to fullness.** Follower of Jesus, you are complete in Jesus, period. Complete in Jesus. **He is the head over every power and authority.** He is head over every political party and all God's people said... Amen. He is head over every nation on the earth and all God's people said... Amen. He is head over these times and all God's people said... Amen

I want to look briefly at Genesis 3 to remind ourselves of the deceptive ways of Satan. And the frontal assault, the direct assault he comes at us with in denying God's word. In Chapter 3, we see the fall. In Chapters 1 and 2, we get creation, we get marriage, we get the Imago Dei: you and I have been given the image of God. The image of God is in every human being which gives us automatic intrinsic value.

Chapter 3 – the great deception and the fall of man. Genesis 3 – **1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"** Remember, he who frames the question wins the debate. That's not what God said, but don't you love people that twist the question.

2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” And let’s see the three-part strategy of how Satan deceives us.

4 “You will not certainly die,” That’s number one. Flat out denies the Word of God. It’s a little bit different than what we are going to see with the Gnostics in just a second. They don’t come with this frontal assault like Satan does. ...**the serpent said to the woman. 5 “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened...**” That’s the second one. You’ll be illumined. You’ll have greater knowledge.

This is why I stand firmly against anything called progressive Christianity. One, I think it’s highly offensive to the apostles. “We appreciate all you did for the faith, but we’re progressing.” Listen, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We don’t need progressive Christianity, we just need to stay away from distorted versions of Christianity. We need to be firmly planted, rooted deep in Christ.

I don’t need my eyes opened. People send me videos like, “Watch this; 5G is giving us all cancer.” I ain’t got time for this. Who has time for this? “It’s very important that you know it and preach about it.” I guess I am, but I’m going the opposite direction you want me to go with it. Stop looking for greater knowledge when you have it in Christ. Complete understanding in the mysteries of God, namely Christ.

Number three – “...**and you will be like God...**” Isn’t that ultimately what man is trying to do? I don’t need God, I am God. “...**knowing good and evil.**”

It’s a little bit different with what we’re seeing in this text with the Gnostics. One author put it this way. *In many cases the Gnostic heretics...* Which is who we are dealing with in Chapter 2 and especially the first part of Chapter 2. ...*did not make a frontal assault...* Like we just read in Genesis 3. They are denying the word of God, yes, but it’s not as in your face as what we just read. ...*against the apostles or against the apostolic teaching of Scripture. In fact, many of them insisted that they were genuine, Bible-believing Christians.*

This is what I feel like we’re really contending for in the church today. Christian authors, Christian leaders, Christian pastors, who are denying the traditional view of marriage, they are moving against so many issues in our day that we know we stand on firmly in the Word of God and the reason it sounds so good and the reason so many Christians are being deceived is because these people come across as Bible believing Christians. And they are not flat out denying the Word of God, they are just adding to the word of God. *It wasn’t that they rejected the Bible; they just claimed an additional source of knowledge...*

And I would say that for many progressive Christians today, that is that experience. I’ve had this experience. The reason I’m no longer standing the scripture with this issue is because my daughter or my son went through this and now it changes what I believe. ...*or insight that was superior to or at least beyond the knowledge of Scripture.* – Michael Horton in The Agony of Deceit

Avoid Faith Drift

So, in the last couple of minutes we have, in just rapid fire, I want to talk to the young people. And many of them in our services during this time are going off to college. I have a daughter that's going to college next year. I just want to talk to you a little bit about avoiding faith drift. How to move out of your parents' home and stay firmly rooted in Christ.

1. Surround yourself with voices rooted in Christ, meaning when you get to college or you get to university or if you're not going to college and you're going into the trades, you find people to help you stay rooted in Christ. This is why we did a message called *Why We Gather*. You need voices rooted in Christ gathered around you. I have a friend right now going through a lot at a college because he's brought in other voices from outside the faith. Parents are freaking out because they don't want their kids to hear from them. I have no problem with kids hearing from another voice, so long as the primary voice in their life is rooted in Christ. We're going to have all sorts of voices around us. Make sure your inner circle, make sure those that you walk with the closest are rooted in Christ.

2. Study subjects according to Christ. As you begin your studies and figuring out what you are going to do, study subjects according to Christ. I wish we could do a whole message on this and maybe we will at some point. I'm just going to give you three examples, but I'd love to go through all of the disciplines and give you examples from the scripture and examples from great leaders today who are doing this.

- **Study philosophy.** Some people look at Colossians 2 and say this is why you abandon philosophy altogether. No, Paul didn't. The author of our text today... Paul stood up before the men of Athens and he used philosophy to teach the gospel. Read about it in Acts 17. He quoted from their poets. But he used philosophy because he knew this would win them over. If you're going to study philosophy, study it according to Christ.
- If you are going to study **biology**, study it according to Christ. We get this great example often up here when Dr. Travis Brawner gets up here and preaches and teaches. Why? It's because he teaches biology according to Christ. He talks about cells. He talks about the human body and he presents the gospel through the whole thing.
- Study **astronomy** (not astrology) according to Christ. We get this great example in Louie Giglio. You see how we could just pull out the book indescribable, we sing indescribable. He loves to study the stars and in all of it, he's preaching the Good News of Jesus.

When you go off to college, don't be so open minded that your brain falls out. Be rooted in Christ. And all the young people said... Amen.

3. Don't read everything you're handed and don't watch everything you're sent. Can I get an amen on from my Facebook friends on that one? We're done! No more stuff! I ain't got time for homework!

4. Prioritize what your parents marginalized. Young people, if your parents didn't prioritize church, you prioritize it. If serving in the church wasn't a big deal to your parents, you prioritize it. You hear this and maybe you've seen it online before. Kids will never prioritize what their parents marginalize. Well, I'm calling out young people today, encouraging you to prioritize what your mom and dad didn't think was important. If gathering with voices rooted in Christ was not important to Mom and Dad, you make it important in your life, especially as you leave home, as you leave this church. Find good healthy voices pouring into you.

Father, in the name of Jesus, we thank you for this time. I pray right now for every young person in our church as they pursue marriage and the trades and careers and college and families and going out on their own, that this would be a church that is constantly contending for their faith. That we would stay rooted in Christ. May Woodland Hills never be a distorted version of Christianity. May you guard that at this church. May we prioritize Christ and Christ crucified in all that we do.

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus, that today would be the day that they confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord, confess their sins, believe in their heart he has been raised from the dead, as we have been singing all morning, and place faith in Jesus.

We pray all of this in the good name and the authority of that name, Jesus. Amen.