

Colossians: The Incomparable Christ – Exposition of Colossians

Colossians 2:1-7

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October 27, 1996

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Colossians 2, as we continue our study of Paul's letter. You will remember in our previous study, particularly in chapter 1 that we have emphasized Paul's focus on the person and work of Christ. There are people in Colossae who are teaching the Christians there that what they believe about Christ is fine, but if they really want to grow in the Christian faith, they need to move beyond Christ. They need to supplement Christ. They need to add something to Christ. The Apostle Paul combats that teaching by showing us who Christ is and what He has done and then asking if Christ is who I say He is and if Christ has done what I say He has done, why would you possibly look anywhere else for Him if you truly want to grow in the Christian life.

In fact the theme of the whole book of Colossians is that every believer is complete in Christ, that all the resources that we need to grow in grace are found in Him. And the process of deepening in the Christian life is not starting with Christ and moving on to something else, but it is starting on Christ and remaining in dependence upon Him every step of the way as we are conformed to His image, who is the very image of the invisible God. Let's attend then to the first seven verses of Colossians 2.

Colossians 2:1-7

Our Lord and our God, we acknowledge this is Your word, Your very word, Your inspired word, Your infallible word, meant for our edification, meant to glorify Christ. Apply it to us, we pray, by Your Spirit. Touch us so that we might be hearers and doers of it. Encourage us. Strengthen us. Challenge us. Correct us through it and help us to come to it obediently, bowing the knee before our Savior as we hear Him speaking to us by His word. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Verses 6 and 7 of Colossians 2 summarize the whole book. In these two verses, the Apostle Paul sets forth principles which he intends to drive home in a variety of ways in each of the chapters of this book. He summarizes for us his concern that Christians remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, but also that Christians grow. He was dealing with people who had come into contact with false teachers

who said what you first heard was all right, but let us tell you something additional to Christ which will help you grow more deeply in your Christian faith.

The Apostle Paul does not respond to that by saying it is an illegitimate concern to want to grow deeper in the knowledge of God. He does not respond by saying it is illegitimate to want to have a deeper and greater experience of God and of His power in our life. He says the problem with that false teaching is not that it wants to grow deeper in the faith. It's that it does it the wrong way. It ignores the first principles of spirituality which are as we start with Christ, so we live in Christ; He is the alpha and the omega.

So the Apostle Paul says I want you to grow too. In fact, I want you to grow more than those new teachers to grow, but I want you to grow the only way you can grow and that is the right way. So he utters these words, "As you have received Christ the Lord, so walk in Him." He sets before us truths about Christian living, Christian growing, Christian believing, and Christian thanksgiving in these two short verses and I would like to point you to those four great things this morning.

I. An exhortation concerning the Christian life.

Look first at verse 6. There the Apostle Paul gives us an exhortation concerning the Christian life. Notice this phrase: "Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." The Apostle Paul is reminding us that all Christians live in Christ the Lord. In other words, Paul is summoning us to live a lifestyle worthy of the Lord. You know that the term "walk" that Paul and others use is found by the way in Psalm 1 which we read today. The term "walk" refers to living. It is a metaphor for living life. Paul is saying walk in Christ, as you have received Him as Lord, so live in Him, so walk in Him. He is calling believers to live in a way which is consistent to what they have professed as far as being followers, disciples of Jesus Christ.

Notice the very words that he uses to describe Jesus, to give us instructions about what it means to live in Him or walk in Him. He calls Him, "Christ Jesus the Lord." "Christ" the Messiah, the One who has come to save His people. "Jesus" whose very name reminds us that God the Savior has come to rescue His people from sin. The "Lord" which reminds us that Jesus is not merely a good man, He is not merely an example, and He is not merely a Savior; but He is a Savior because He is Lord, He is God, He is the ruler of His people. "As you have received Christ Jesus as Lord" and that is the basic baptismal vow of the early church – Jesus is Lord. "As you have received Him as Lord, so walk in Him." Live in a way which is consistent with what you first said when you came to Christ.

And Paul in that little phrase gives us two very important principles in pursuing this great imperative. First, in this phrase he reminds us that receiving Christ is not the end but the beginning of spiritual life. Very often we think of coming to the

point of committing ourselves to Christ, that is the culmination of the Spirit's work in us. Far from it. It is just the beginning of the Spirit's work in us. Receiving Christ, professing Him, acknowledging Him to be our Savior, does not end our spiritual adventure; it inaugurates a spiritual relationship which will never ever end. And Paul wants us to remember that receiving Christ is not something isolated, it is not something that you just did in the past, and it is something that continues to go on in your experience.

Coupled with that truth, he gives us another truth in that little phrase. And that second truth is that all growth and progress in the Christian life must be consistent with its beginning. If we began the Christian life by professing Christ as Lord, our living of the Christian life must be consistent with that profession. If Christ is the object of our faith, if He is the one who saves us, then surely it is Christ who must be the sphere of our spiritual growth and development. He is the one on whom we must be dependent. He is the one from whom we are to receive the spiritual resources in order to be edified and built up in our relationship with God.

So the Apostle Paul wants us to remember those coordinate truths. Our profession only inaugurated our relationship with God. It is not the end of it. Do you remember, friends, from your youth who when they first began to be interested in spiritual things wanted to quickly make the profession of faith, whether it be in a youth group or in a grand assembly, so that they could get back to the business of living how they wanted to without fear of eternal punishment. That is to misconceive what it means to receive Christ as Lord. It is not the end of our doing business with God, it is the beginning of that relationship. Paul wants us to remember that and he wants us to remember that the way we grow must be consistent with how we first believed, how we first came into relationship with God.

II. The Christian life entails growing.

Now you may rightly ask Paul could you flesh that out for me, could you explain a little bit what it means then to walk in Him as we received Him. Well, the Apostle Paul was ahead of you because that is precisely what he does in verse 7. And I would like to point you to three phrases in verse 7 in which he describes what it means to walk in the Lord in the manner in which we received him.

First, the first phrase in verse 7 "having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him." This phrase reminds us that the Christian life always involves growth. It involves growing. And Paul is teaching us here that all Christians grow in grace, having been rooted and built up in Him. Paul expects Christians to grow. Notice that these are not imperatives, these are participles. Paul is simply describing what a person who walks in Christ looks like. He is not saying I want you to grow, he is saying you will grow. If you are a believer, you will grow. You are going to

be growing in Christ. He expects our interest in spiritual growth and he expects to see growth itself in believers. And He expects this growth not to be by our own strength, but he expects this growth to be dependent on Christ.

Notice his phrase: "having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him." He knows that this growth will only be in Him, in Christ, in union with Christ, in relationship to Him, empowered by Him, instructed by Him, dependent on Him. We will grow only as we are in relationship to Christ, the Apostle Paul says. The power to live a new life depends upon our daily living and communing with the living God through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul is reminding us that our spiritual growth is dependent upon our relationship to Christ. We do not grow deeper in our knowledge of God by supplementing Christ, by augmenting Christ, by leaving Him behind to something rudimentary and moving to something more profound. We grow in knowledge and experience of God by our communion with Christ and union with Him.

Robert Murray McCheyne said a long time ago in reflecting on his own growth: "I am persuaded that nothing is thriving in my soul unless it is growing." Are you growing? Are you concerned for spiritual growth? Are you doing business with God? Are you doing self-examination? Are you asking yourselves if the signs of spiritual growth are in you? The Apostle Paul expects them. Paul expects believers to be growing. That is the first thing that he says. Someone who is walking as he originally professed, they will be growing.

III. The Christian life entails believing.

The second thing in verse 7, the middle phrase: "Establish in your faith just as you were instructed." Paul reminds us here that the Christian life entails believing truth. The Christian life entails believing truth. In other words, Paul is reminding us that all Christians are founded on the faith once delivered. We don't just believe in believing. We believe in the truth. We believe in the word which the apostles preached, which Christ preached. We believe in the word which is given to us in scripture. And our faith is established in that instruction. The Apostle Paul reminds us here that to be established in faith means to be consolidated in the truth. We have acknowledged that truth in our first profession: Christ Jesus is Lord. But we continue to be consolidated, continuously strengthened in that truth, not only in our more firmly holding to that truth, not only in knowing more of the truth, but being deepened in our appreciation for the profundity of the truth. In all those things we grow as we believe the faith once delivered.

You see, without a full and mature understanding, there can be no satisfying Christianity for the individual and there cannot be a stable church. Because Paul tells us that truth is for the purpose of godliness. And if we do not attend ourselves to truth, we will not walk in the way of godliness.

C. S. Spurgeon once said that “Men to be truly won to Christ must be truly won to truth.” That is absolutely true. But it is also true of those of us who desire to grow in grace. If we are to continue to grow in grace, we must continue to avail ourselves of the truth of the scriptures.

May I ask again, are you interested in that type of spiritual growth? Are you interested in the truth? Do you find yourself loving the word? Do you find yourself loving the study of the word? Do you find yourself occasionally having lifelong habits corrected by your new understanding of what the word of God teaches, penetrating your reality and saying to you, “You must do differently,” or “You must do these things which you have never done before.” Do you find yourself refreshed in the word, giving yourself to the truth, desiring to know more of God and His word? That is a sign of healthy spiritual growth. And the Apostle Paul says that is a part of what it means to live in Him, to walk in Him in the way you first received Him.

IV. The Christian life entails thanksgiving.

Then at the end of verse 7, the Apostle Paul adds this phrase, “overflowing with gratitude.” Here the Apostle Paul teaches that the Christian life involves thanksgiving. The Christian life invariably entails thanksgiving. Paul, in other words is teaching that all Christians are filled with gratitude to God. Notice again the phrase, “overflowing with gratitude.” Paul is reminding us that to be filled with thanksgiving, to have a thankful heart is a mark of the Spirit doing a work in you. As we think about gratitude and thanksgiving in our experience, there are two interesting components to it. Negatively, gratitude lifts our thoughts from ourselves because true thanksgiving is born in a spirit of humility. Positively, gratitude directs our hearts toward God, from whom all growth comes and to whom, therefore, all praise and glory should be given. So thanksgiving and gratitude move us from off ourselves and onto God. It comes from humility and it ends in praise.

Notice that Paul considers this to be a hallmark of the Christian life. When he describes what it is to live and walk in the Lord, he includes growing, believing, and thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is a hallmark of the spiritual life. And so ingratitude always points to a spiritual deficiency.

Notice, by the way, the Scripture does not say that Christians may begin to give thanks now that they are walking in the Lord. That is not his phrase. Paul says overflowing with thanksgiving, overflowing with gratitude. We don't begin to be thankful as believers, but the ocean of our gratitude is overflowing its perimeters

There are many of you here today who have friends and acquaintances who have a great deal. They are enormously materially blessed. They may be blessed greatly in terms of their status, their influence in the community, their

position, and the esteem in which they are held. And yet some of you know some of them to be extremely unhappy people. People who, in fact, some of whom are bitter. And you wonder, "How could a person have so much and be so bitter?"

On the other hand, many of you here this day know many people who don't have so much. They don't share in some of the enormous resources that others around us have. And yet, strangely, we find some of them to be grateful people. They seem to have comparatively little. They are always thanking God for it. What is the difference between those sorts of people?

The first kind of person has much temporarily and nothing spiritually, because God's presence in a person's life makes a person grateful. The second type of person, though they have little materially, yet rich spiritually. Because God's presence makes us aware of who we are and, therefore, what we ought to deserve at His hands. When we see the riches that we have in Christ, we cannot help but be grateful for what the Lord has given us, no matter what our particular lives.

There are some of you, today, who are in the midst of great trials. Or perhaps you have experienced things in the past which could have made you bitter. But you have not become bitter. Why? I would suggest to you that the reason some of you have come to this place this day with burdens that not many other people know and yet have refused to give in to the bile of bitterness because God has done a spiritual work in you. And because of that you have not given in to bitterness in the midst of the trials of life, you have remained grateful. God has blessed you for that. God is blessing you in that. It is a testimony, my friends, when we face difficulties in this life, to remain grateful, to not to concede to bitterness, that testifies to the world around us of the reality of the faith and of the blessings which are held for those who love God.

The Bible says the growing Christian is one who is established in the faith, who is rooted in Christ, and is overflowing in gratitude. Are Christians going to grow into a deeper knowledge of Christ? Absolutely. Are they to do it by supplementing Christ? By going to something else apart from Christ, outside of Him? Absolutely not. In Christ are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, the Apostle says. It is in Him that we grow. God help us to center our hope of growth on Him and when people come and whisper in our ears and say, "You need Christ plus this," may we turn a deaf ear to that type of persuasion. However persuasive the words may be, and may we say to them, "Oh, no, in Christ I have my all in all," once you receive Him as your Lord. Let's look to Him in prayer.

Our Lord and our God, we thank you that You are concerned for our growth in relationship with Yourself. You made us for Yourself and our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Thee. And we find that that is not a point, but it is a line in our experience. We are never filled enough. We are never stopping in our desire and our thirst to know You more. But help us to pursue that in the right way, in

such a way that we remember the first principles of faith, that we never leave Christ, that we never question His sufficiency, that we never add something that He has not said is necessary for spiritual life. O, God, bring growth in this congregation, individually and collectively and use it for Your praise and glory. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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