

**Series:** The Letter to the Colossians

**Title:** “Alive in Christ, Part 1”

**Text:** Colossians 2:6-7

**Date:** August 13, 2023

## **Verse 6**

Colossians 2:6 began a new section in Paul’s letter to the Colossians. The apostle moved on from introductory matters of his letter. He introduced a new topic of discussion by saying, “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him...” (Colossians 2:6). In the verses that followed, Paul would give a detailed treatment of practical matters related to the Christian faith.

### *“Therefore”*

The word “therefore” was significant. It has often been said, “Whenever you see a ‘therefore’ in Scripture, you should ask, ‘What is it *there for*?’” In the case of Colossians 2:6, the term pointed back to verse 5. It indicated that Paul’s words in verse 6 were a conclusion drawn from what he had said in the previous verse.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the word “therefore” revealed that verse 6 provided an explanation of how the believers at Colossae might experience the “firmness of...faith in Christ” spoken of in verse 5.

### *“Received”*

In talking about how to be firm in the faith, Paul made reference to the way his readers had “received Christ.” The word “received” was a technical term from first-century Judaism. It often spoke of the way pupils received rabbinical teachings and traditions from rabbis.<sup>2</sup> The term was eventually Christianized and used of the transmission of gospel truth. As used in our current text, it referred to the moment the Christians at Colossae were converted. Paul used the term in this same sense in Philippians 4:9 and 1 Thessalonians 4:1.

Paul used the word “received” in verse 6 to remind his readers of the way they had embraced Christ in faith after having heard the gospel message via Epaphras (Colossians 1:6-7; Acts 19:10). His reference to such things in Colossians 2:6 is significant. Since the new section of his letter focused on the practical living out of the Christian life, his reference to the Colossians’ conversion reveals that regeneration has major implications on daily Christian living. One cannot truly live for Christ unless he or she has truly received Christ. Furthermore, all building and advancing in the Christian life is subject to the rudimentary principles of the gospel.

Paul would later appeal to the Colossians’ initial reception of the gospel in verse 7, saying, “...as you were taught” (Colossians 2:7). The principles of Christ living a righteous life, dying as a substitute for sin, and being raised to give us life are the foundation of all Christian living. One has said, “The Christian life continues as it

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<sup>1</sup> Beale, G.K. *Colossians and Philemon: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 170.

<sup>2</sup> Rogers Jr., Cleon and Cleon Rogers III. *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 463.

commenced.”<sup>3</sup> Paul wanted the Colossians to know that the gospel was something for sanctification, not just salvation. The power to live the Christian life came from Christ, not Mosaic ceremonies, mystical experiences with angels, or Gnostic knowledge.

To emphasize his point, Paul used the verb translated “received” in the aorist tense, depicting a once-for-all action in the past.<sup>4</sup> He wanted to stress the fact that the Colossians' past conversion had ongoing implications for their entire Christian experience. The new teachings at Colossae were to be rejected. The true believers within the church needed to stick with simple gospel truth.

Paul’s words have application for believers of all generations. God’s children should be vigilant to stick with apostolic truth. Novel spins on the old faith are usually false. It has often been said, “If it’s new, it probably isn’t true.” The old faith is the orthodox faith. Furthermore, the rudimentary principles of the gospel are the building blocks on which a strong Christian life is built. One should never feel a need to advance beyond the basics of Christ’s life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, or Second Coming. Such events secure the believer’s salvation, but they are also the means by which one receives power to live the Christian life.

There is something more we should note about Paul’s use of the word “receive.” While it highlighted the Colossians’ initial salvation, it also pointed to their union with Christ. Such union is what makes Christianity unique among world religions. At salvation, one actually receives a portion of Christ’s Spirit (Galatians 3:2). Yes, one receives Christ in the sense of accepting Christ’s teaching and truth, but one also receives Christ in that Christ comes to live within the soul of that person through the new birth (John 3:3) and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). In his letter to the Colossians, Paul was deliberate to speak of the believer’s union with Christ (Colossians 1:2, 18). He wanted his readers to know that Christianity is more than adherence to a principle, precept, or program of religion. It involves union and communion with the God-Man — Jesus Christ!

### *“Christ Jesus the Lord”*

It is important to note the title Paul used for our Lord in Colossians 2:6. He referred to Jesus as “Christ Jesus the Lord.” In the original language of the New Testament, emphasis was placed on Paul’s title for Jesus.<sup>5</sup> The apostle’s language was significant. One has noted that “...this is the only place in the New Testament where this combination of names and titles appears in this order.”<sup>6</sup> Paul undoubtedly had something important to say about Jesus. He wanted to highlight the special nature of our Lord.

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<sup>3</sup> Walvoord, John F., and Roy B. Zuck, Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 676.

<sup>4</sup> Nielson, John B. *Beacon Bible Commentary: Volume IX*. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1965), 397.

<sup>5</sup> Davenant, John. *Geneva Series of Commentaries: Colossians*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 379.

<sup>6</sup> Johnston, Mark G. *Let’s Study: Colossians and Philemon*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), 55.

Paul knew that some of his readers were being duped by lies. The Gnostic heresy was famous for its docetic teaching. Docetism maintained that "...Jesus only 'seemed' or appeared to have a human body and to be a human person."<sup>7</sup> Such belief was rooted in a philosophy that regarded physical matter as being inherently corrupt. Paul contradicted such a perspective by calling Jesus the "Christ." The title literally meant "anointed one." It was used in Judaism of the long-awaited human deliverer (Genesis 3:15).

In addition to the title "Christ," Paul also called Jesus "Lord." The title was one that referred to Jesus' divine nature (Philippians 2:11). In the famous Greek translation of the Old Testament used in Jesus' day (Septuagint), the title was the Greek translation of the Hebrew title Yahweh.<sup>8</sup> Paul felt the need to underscore the deity of Christ. Some forms of early Gnosticism contended that Jesus was not God. It was believed that the Spirit of God descended on him at his baptism (Mark 1:10) and later departed from him at the cross (Matthew 27:46). Paul, as he did elsewhere in his letter to the Colossians (Colossians 1:19; 2:9), refuted such beliefs. He wanted his readers to know that Jesus was the fully-man God-man who lived and died for sins. His two titles "Christ" and "Lord" were designed to uphold these realities.<sup>9</sup>

### "Walk"

Paul's focus in Colossians 2:6-15 was practical matters of the faith. As a result, he used three metaphors in Colossians 2:6-7 to speak of the Christian life. The first metaphor was that of walking. He told his readers, "...so walk in him..." (Colossians 2:6). The concept of walking is a famous New Testament metaphor for Christian living (Ephesians 4:1). Paul used it on other occasions in his letter to the Colossians (Colossians 1:10; 4:5).

It is important to understand that Scripture used a number of metaphors for Christian living. Consider the way things like abiding (John 15:4-5), dying to self (Mark 8:34), and fruit (Galatians 5:22-23) are used to paint a picture of the Christian experience. There are numerous metaphors in Scripture for godly living. Each points to different realities associated with a godly life. The imagery of walking was likely applied to the Christian life for a number of reasons.

First, consider the prominence of walking in Jesus' ministry. He often taught his disciples while walking on the road (Mark 8:27). He once famously compared the Christian life to a road in his Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:4). Also, Jesus called himself "the way" (or "the road") to God (John 14:6).

Second, the metaphor of walking was used of the Christian life because of Jewish influence on Christianity. Walking was an Old Testament metaphor for godly living (Deuteronomy 6:6; Isaiah 30:21). Rabbinical Judaism used the concept as a

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<sup>7</sup> McKim, Donald K. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 81.

<sup>8</sup> Beale, 171.

<sup>9</sup> Robertson, 489.

metonym for ethical conduct.<sup>10</sup> Considering its Jewish roots, one can understand why the early church used the concept of walking as a metaphor for Christian living.

After discerning the historical and theological roots of the walking metaphor, it is important to consider what it actually meant. It seems there were several meanings of the metaphor. First, walking represented one's lifestyle. It implied that the realities of Christ were to mark the way the believer lived each day, since walking was something one does continually, and since walking was something that marked almost every other activity of life. Because of this, the word "walk" could be translated as "conduct your life."<sup>11</sup>

Second, the metaphor of walking also implied that Christian living involved progress. Commenting on Paul's words in Colossians 2:6, one has said, "The life of a Christian man is in constant motion."<sup>12</sup> Some of Paul's readers had started well in the Christian faith. However, false teachers had thwarted their progress. Many within the church were not moving forward in Christ. Paul encouraged them to "walk" and advance in godliness.

Third, walking also pointed to the need for perseverance and vigilance in faith. In the ancient world, most people walked everyday. Walking was required to go just about anywhere. However, walking had certain dangers. It also led to exhaustion and fatigue at times. When walking, if one stopped or deviated from a path, one could suffer disastrous consequences. Paying attention to how one walked was important. Paul thus used the activity as a metaphor for his readers. Inferior Christian teachings were causing some to stray from the plain paths of Christ. The church needed to be vigilant. It needed to persevere.

Interestingly, Paul employed the term rendered "walk" in the present tense of the Greek language. Such verbiage called for a continual and habitual action.<sup>13</sup> One has said that Paul's words could be translated, "Go on walking in him."<sup>14</sup> The apostle knew his readers were being tempted toward different religious ideals and lifestyles. He wanted them to go on living their lives in light of Christ. Essentially, he told them, as one Greek scholar has said, "Stick to your first lessons in Christ."<sup>15</sup>

Paul's walking metaphor has meaning for all believers of all time. The doctrine of Christ is something that impacts our daily lives. The faith is never something that should be relegated to Sunday alone. In addition, perseverance is necessary for living the Christian life. There will always be dangers and snares that tempt us to defect on Christ. We should be careful to keep walking, to keep moving forward in the faith.

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<sup>10</sup> Wright, N.T. *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*. (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 99.

<sup>11</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 463.

<sup>12</sup> Davenant, 381.

<sup>13</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 463.

<sup>14</sup> Robertson, 489.

<sup>15</sup> Robertson, 489.

## Verse 7

Paul's train of thought from verse 6 continued with him saying, "...rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:7). In verse 6, Paul used the metaphor of walking to speak of the Christian experience. In verse 7, he employed more metaphors — "rooted" and "built up." Altogether, Paul used three metaphors over the span of two verses in order to call his readers to stick to the plain paths of Christian doctrine.

### *"Rooted"*

The word "rooted" was Paul's second metaphor for Christian living in Colossians 2:6-7. It used the root system of a plant or tree as a metaphor for Christian doctrine. Interestingly, Paul's language appeared in the past tense of the Greek (Aorist).<sup>16</sup> His words could be rendered, "once and for all having been rooted."<sup>17</sup> Paul's intent was to refer back to his readers initial reception of the gospel (Colossians 1:7). Just as roots provide plants with strength and stability, the initial reception of Christian truth at salvation gives believers strength and stability in a corrupt and confused world. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the spiritual root system of God's people. Paul used the same Greek word translated "rooted" in Ephesians 3:17 to speak of the believer's sanctification experience.

### *"Built Up"*

In addition to walking and "rooted," Paul provided a third metaphor for his readers. He spoke of his desire for them to be "built up in" Christ. The apostle's third form of imagery was drawn from the world of first-century building construction. His intent was to speak to the way strong Christian lives are built on the foundation of solid Christian doctrine. When one's spiritual foundation is weak, a spiritual fallout is inevitable. Jesus spoke of such things in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:24-27).

Paul emphasized the need for a strong spiritual foundation with a Greek word rendered "established." The term was one that meant "to make firm" or "to strengthen."<sup>18</sup> Paul did not use it as a fourth metaphor. The term served as a qualifier for "built up." It described the resultant state of being built up in Christian doctrine. By sticking to the rudimentary truths of Christ, Paul's readers would be thoroughly established in the faith.

Interestingly, the three Greek verbs translated "rooted," "built up," and "established" all appeared in the passive voice. As a result, they depicted an action being performed upon Paul's readers. The apostle's intent was to convey the idea that it is ultimately the Lord who builds up and establishes his people.<sup>19</sup> Human flesh cannot produce the life of Christ. Spiritual growth and development is dependent upon a work

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<sup>16</sup> Wright, 99.

<sup>17</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), [CD-Rom].

<sup>18</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 464.

<sup>19</sup> Beale, 173.

of the Spirit. The Colossians needed to place their hopes of spiritual growth in the Lord's gracious work in their lives, not human traditions and philosophy.

### *"The Faith"*

In speaking about the spiritual development of his readers, Paul made mention of "the faith." It was "the faith" specifically in which Paul wanted his readers to be "rooted," "built up," and "established." It is worth asking, "What did Paul mean by 'the faith?'" To answer that question, a distinction must be made. When we study the New Testament, we find that faith is often represented in a subjective sense and an objective sense. Subjectively, faith involves a trust, belief, or dependence on Christ (Romans 1:17). Objectively, faith involves the truths, beliefs, or doctrines of Christ (Jude 1:3). The context of Colossians 2:6 seems to indicate that Paul used the word "faith" in an objective sense. He was concerned that his readers were being tempted to defect from the orthodox faith of Christ. His concern was similar to the one Jude expressed in Jude 1:3. He knew his readers were being seduced by doctrines based in human tradition and mystical experiences. He wanted them to know that the only sure path to spiritual strength was the Christian path.

### *"Just As You Were Taught"*

Notice Paul's additional reference to the Colossians' initial conversion experience. He said, "...just as you were taught." His words served a similar purpose to his use of the word "received" in verse 6. He wanted his readers to stick with the initial gospel truth they had received, the gospel truth they had originally heard through the preaching of Epaphras (Colossians 1:7). The newer forms of knowledge and philosophy at Colossae were to be rejected. Paul implemented the same language from Colossians 2:6 in making a similar appeal to the Philippians (Philippians 4:9).<sup>20</sup>

### *"Abounding in Thanksgiving"*

Paul's reference to "thanksgiving" at the end of verse 7 was significant. One should not regard his reference to such activity as a mere addendum to what he said in verses 6 and 7. The apostle didn't mention thanksgiving in a mere empty or obligatory way. He intended to point his readers to the importance of gratitude in the Christian life. Thanksgiving for the person and work of Jesus is essential to strength and endurance in the Christian life. Paul had previously modeled a spirit of gratitude to his readers in Colossians 1:3, 12.

Gratitude for Christ would have kept the Colossians's perspective right. It would have guarded them from pride concerning their own religious efforts. Additionally, it would have guarded them from despair over their own inability to achieve practical righteousness through their own efforts. Most importantly, it would have moved them to reject the hollow philosophies of inferior teachings. Paul knew that when believers practice gratitude for Christ they will be more likely to cling to Christ as the sure source of all spiritual security and strength.

It is important to note the way Paul qualified the need for gratitude. He called his readers to be "*abounding* in thanksgiving." The false professors at Colossae were

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<sup>20</sup> Beale, 174.

known to boast of spiritual riches they received through their mystical experiences and ritualistic observances. Evidence of this is seen in Paul's words in Colossians 1:27 and 2:3. Paul's doctrinal adversaries quite likely implemented the Greek term rendered "abounding" (perisseúō) frequently in their teachings. They used it to speak of supposed spiritual riches they possessed. Paul used their religious vernacular against them. Instead of "abounding" in the fanciful teachings of false teachers, the true believers at Colossae were to abound in gratitude for the person and work of Christ. Paul wanted their hearts to be like rich storehouses overflowing with riches of thanksgiving for gospel truth.

Ultimately, the presence of thanksgiving is a litmus test of spiritual health. One has noted that "...one of the first indicators of departure from God is a lack of thanksgiving."<sup>21</sup> Another has remarked, "Thanksgiving is the fruit of a thriving life in Christ."<sup>22</sup> It's no wonder that Paul regularly remarked on the need for a grateful spirit in Colossae (see 1:3; 1:12; 3:17; and 4:2). The coldness of legalism, as well as the confusion of mysticism, had compromised the church's spiritual strength. Some weren't as grateful for the gospel of Christ as they once had been.

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<sup>21</sup> Melick, [CD-Rom].

<sup>22</sup> Beacon, 398.