

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Walk the Walk Colossians 2:6-8

Intro: Paul, as a prisoner of Rome, has received word that the church in Colosse, a congregation of believers he has never met, is being inundated with false theology from outside influences and are in danger of losing, or should we say forgetting, the simplicity of their faith in Christ, a faith they had previously received by responding positively to the truth of the gospel message, brought to them by Epaphras. Nowhere in this letter does Paul imply or assume or show any sign of despair that the Colossians have succumbed to this false teaching, as he does with the Galatians; but the Colossians could stand to hear a word of caution about the real possibility of their pure faith being hijacked.

Paul has already laid the groundwork for his approach to this congregation's problem: 1) he will affirm everything that Jesus has to offer these believers which, of course, are everything they will ever need; 2) he will attack anything that attempts to undermine the all-encompassing sufficiency of Christ's work. We have already seen this approach several times in the letter. Over and over again, Paul presents the argument that Jesus Christ is everything; when you're in Christ you have everything and when you already have everything, to move in any other direction is a step down, a subtraction – a loss. Any move away from Christ is a great loss indeed.

This argument is outlined once again in v6-7. These 2 verses mark the pivotal point of the letter, summing up what has gone before and establishing the approach Paul is about to take.

6-7- The focus of this passage is clear: a belief system that does not have an impact on one's behavior is **useless**. Warren Wiersbe puts it this way: A faith that does not change you cannot save you. The theme of this verse connects faith to practice. On the faith side, the Colossians have received Jesus Christ as Lord and have been taught the basic principles of the Christian faith. On the practice side, they need to continue to walk or live in Him and to be built up in Him, becoming strengthened in the faith and overflowing with thankfulness. It's a wonderful rule of Christian living that we cannot perfect in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit so, just as we

received Jesus Christ (by grace through faith) so we should continue to walk in Him (by His grace through our faith in Him).

The Colossians had received Christ through their positive response to the gospel. They had opened their hearts to Him and He has become a living presence in their lives. But, do they truly realize exactly Whom they have received? From what Paul has written of Him so far, they certainly should. This is Christ Jesus the Lord! Each word in this title has meaning. Christ is the anointed One, the chosen of God. Christ is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Messiah, but Paul's frequent use of the term as a title for use in Gentile churches shows that he sees Jesus as more than just the fulfillment of Jewish hopes. He's the One sent by the Father, with His blessing into the world to bring salvation.

He is also Jesus, a human being, sharing the miserable lot of humanity and shedding His blood on the cross. He possessed a real human body, as all of us tend to do and He was susceptible to all the failings and frailties that we all experience throughout our lives. He was 100% human. The false religions of that day contended that His body wasn't the same as ours or that the physical Jesus was different from the spiritual or divine Jesus. I'm not sure how that was supposed to work (sounds shady) but are we to assume that in His early years working as a carpenter's apprentice under Joseph, that Jesus never got a blister or a callous or even a hang-nail? He never stubbed His toe or jammed His finger? No, I'm sure He experienced all the joys and consequences of manual labor and, if there were any He happened to miss out on, He would experience them to the fullest when He hung on the cross.

But, above all other titles, we can never forget that Jesus is Lord! Lord is the title normally given by Jews to God and it sums up everything that's been said previously about the incarnation of Christ and His supreme role in creation. This title also logically stresses the rule of Christ. Jesus isn't just a Lord, He's the Lord, not some divine hero or lesser household god or a member of the pantheon of lords; no, He's the unique Lord, the one-and-only Lord to which there is no equal! He's the source of creation, the sustainer of creation and He is creation's ultimate goal.

To receive Jesus is to receive a Lord. Accepting the gospel moves the believer out from under the authority of the kingdom of darkness into the

sphere or rule of the kingdom of Christ – and that means into the rule of a King. The Bible provides many pictures of the place Jesus holds in the life of the believer. He's a friend the sticks closer than a brother; a loving and tender Shepherd to His sheep; an Advocate, a Comforter – a Healer. Each of these is a true aspect of His relationship to His people but, while they are true, they do not supersede the fact that He is first and foremost a King, in fact, He is the King of kings – our King.

So, in light of this truth, to receive Christ as Lord is to commit oneself to following Him, serving Him and doing His will. Since the Colossians were now bound to Christ Jesus as their Lord, they were also now bound to be obedient to Him. Jesus requires that their conduct be consistent with His Lordship. Being in Christ, therefore, transforms the way Christians live. It has consequences for the life that follows: live your lives in Him – literally, keep walking in Him! Accepting Christ is simply the beginning of a journey of faith, it is not an end in itself. Salvation (conversion) is an exciting experience but it's simply the thrill of a bugle sounding the charge into battle or the crack of a starter's pistol that begins the marathon. The excitement of salvation will not be enough to sustain us in the battle or help us maintain a winning pace in the race – we continue to need His grace to strengthen our faith and help us endure.

In v7, Paul lists 4 characteristics of what it means to walk (or live) in Him, each expressed with a participle. The 1st participle is rooted and since it appears in the perfect tense, it expresses the continuing result of an action that was completed in the past. Paul's saying that what these believers have been taught in the past of Christian doctrine has effectively rooted them into the Christian faith. The image in this word recalls Jeremiah's blessing on those who trust in God and whose confidence is placed in Him (**Jer 17:8**). Green leaves are a sign of a healthy plant that is receiving all the water and nutrients it needs to sustain growth and to produce fruit abundantly.

Modern grammar experts, like editors, take a dim view of the use of mixed metaphors but Paul doesn't seem to hold to such blathering nonsense as he provides for us a curious combination of metaphors in this verse. Paul moves from the idea of a plant being rooted to a building being constructed in Christ. It's possible that the root as the plant's foundation may have inspired the merging of the 2 images but regardless of the cause, being built up implies that believers are still under construction and are not yet a

finished project.

The 3rd characteristic of the Colossians walking (living) in Christ is that they're established (strengthened) in the faith. Now this could mean that the Colossians are strengthened by their faith or with respect to their faith. The 2 options have different meanings but they are not mutually exclusive: it could mean both. As we are strengthened in the faith, our faith strengthens us. This participle, like the previous 2, is in the passive voice which indicates that divine action is essential for all Christian growth. These believers have not rooted themselves, have not built themselves up and have not strengthened themselves – God has done all of this. He has done it in them and He has done it for them.

The 4th characteristic is abounding (overflowing) with thanksgiving and it is in the active voice. This means that God's action, His divine work in the lives of believers should produce an overwhelming spirit of thanksgiving on their part. Just as luxuriant green leaves are a sign of a healthy plant so profuse thanksgiving is the unfailing mark of a healthy spiritual life. Those who bubble over with gratitude for what God has already done are not easy prey to anxiety or doubt. They have no need or desire to look for fulfillment elsewhere and they cannot be taken in by false promises or have their faith shaken by disgruntled detractors.

You might say that the metaphor of a plant being rooted and a structure being built are not that far apart but we must remember that these pictures were given within the context of Paul's call for the Colossians to walk in Christ. Now, I've never see a tree or a building walk, just like I've never seen a horse fly or a front porch swing. But I am sure that Paul is well aware of the apparent contradiction between the image of a journey and static picture of rootedness and building on a solid foundation. Both are necessary to explain what it means to be a Christian. Christ is the source of strength and stability, the sure foundation on which to build a successful Christian life. At the same time, Jesus is a guide and a trailblazer in a relationship that is dynamic, it's a relationship that is constantly and consistently growing and moving towards spiritual maturity.

Christian discipleship is about learning new things about God, finding new ways to serve Him and discovering new ways to worship Him. At the same time, it provides an underlying peace and security in the knowledge of God's

love which can enable the Christian pilgrim to weather the storms of changing circumstances, and their accompanying fears and doubts, that are likely to be encountered all along the journey.

The use of the passive voice in the 3 pictures of stability in v7 indicate something that's been done to the Colossians, rather than something they have to do themselves. The use of the passive voice is a common biblical and Jewish way of speaking of the actions of God. The Colossians have to walk, they have to live out their Christian lives, but they have been given the necessary basis for that life by God. He has rooted, built up and established them in the faith. This happened (and continues to happen) to the degree that they continue to receive the teaching that is contained within the gospel.

None of this is to say that the Colossians plays no part in the process, but their part is willingly passive rather than active. They need to be ready to receive the teaching and willing to learn what is being taught. The more they learn about God and the more they realize what He has done for them and what He has to offer them, the more they will abound in thanksgiving.

In these 2 verses, Paul has outlined the 2-sided nature of Christian life. It's a life that is lived by following Christ, by actively putting into practice the call to both service and thanksgiving. It is a life that receives from God, drawing on His strength, accepting His grace and learning of Him and from Him. It is this pattern of receiving and acting, of being grounded in Christ and in the awareness of all that He has done, that Paul sets in direct opposition against the false teaching the Colossians have been exposed to.

8- This verse provides the first direct clue in the letter that the Colossian church faced an outside danger. Since they possess so much due to their relationship with Christ, they now need to beware that they do not lose it! The best sense of the phrase cheat you is actually, to lead you away as prey – or, quite literally, to kidnap you. So, to take up Paul's metaphor, since these believers have been set free by Christ, they must now be careful not to be recaptured by the realm of darkness.

Paul describes the current threat, the potential abductor, as a hollow and deceptive philosophy but this tells us very little about what this dangerous philosophy actually entailed. We should be careful not to extend Paul's

repudiation of a specific, empty philosophy to a rejection of philosophy in general. In the ancient world, philosophy was a highly regarded discipline in the Greek-speaking world, and later, in the Roman world. But, by Paul's day, the term was then being used to refer to all sorts of religious groups, religious tendencies and religious points of view, including magical practices. Almost every belief system and superstition described itself as a philosophy in order to gain a certain intellectual legitimacy. This broad meaning of the term and the fact that Paul later describes this philosophy in terms of unnecessary religious practices (16), makes the word religion a more suitable translation.

Paul draws several contrasts between the gospel and this philosophy. The gospel is the word of truth (1:5-6) while this philosophy is deceptive. Christ rescues and liberates hostages (1:13) while this philosophy takes the gullible captive, makes them slaves of error and pulls them back into the dominion of darkness (classic scene from original Jurassic Park, "Well, we're back in the car"). This hollow philosophy is further defined by 3 prepositional phrases, each implying certain aspects of what the philosophy depends on. But, Paul has no intention of providing us with a full description of this particular heresy. He only intends to stress the glories that these believers already possess in Christ so that they can see just how much this philosophy falls short.

1st) This philosophy depends on human tradition. Of course, there's nothing wrong with human tradition per se', but Paul discredits this philosophy as a belief system that is derived from humans only and directly contrasts it with the divine revelation that they had received in Christ. When Paul said they had received Christ Jesus the Lord (6) he used received as a technical term that refers to the transmission of teaching or tradition. The contrast is clear: the Colossians did not receive a tradition created by humans; they received a Person, the Lord Jesus, the Ruler and Reconciler of all creation.

2nd) This philosophy depends on the basic principles of the world. It was commonly accepted by Jews and pagans alike that the basic idea of cause and effect was the standard rule over the nature and minds of men. The majority of people in the ancient world lived under the idea that they got what they deserved: when they're good, they deserve to receive good; when they're bad, they deserve to receive bad. What goes around...comes around. Not much has changed. Paul's warning the Colossians not to

subject them to this grace-eliminating kind of thinking. They are to reject it and to consider themselves to be dead to it.

There's also the possibility that this phrase is meant to read the elemental spirits of the world. This is not meant to arbitrarily insert some mysterious quality into this false teaching but comes from Paul's own derisive appraisal of this false teaching. The phrase parallels other negative descriptions used to discredit a philosophy that kidnaps, is empty and deceptive and depends on human tradition. Just as the key word in the phrase tradition of men is of men, so the key part of this phrase is of the world. Paul debunks this teaching as belonging to the material world that was created by Christ but is now alienated from God and in need of redemption and reconciling. This philosophy belongs to the domain of flesh, sin and death; where demonic powers still wield their influence.

Paul does not dismiss these malevolent spiritual powers as being nonexistent or regard them merely as myths but he does see them as rivals to Christ and asserts that they're all subservient to Christ. He contends that the philosophy he is warning them against depends on these created, malignant powers; not on the beneficent Creator. All spiritual powers, whether good or evil, are part of the universe which is itself both fallen and sinful. Thus, to look to them is just another form of idolatry, for they are created beings and, like humans, they can only find their true purpose and fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Though they may seem to be both powerful and mysterious, they pale in comparison to their Creator and to suppose that they can either replace or supplement the work of Christ fails to recognize who Jesus truly is. This is nothing less than a gross distortion of the truth.

3rd) Paul also characterizes this philosophy as being devoid of truth. This idea reflects Paul's deep conviction that all Christ-less teaching is empty at its core. As something hollow, this philosophy can't fill anyone with anything except more emptiness. By contrast, the Colossians have received the word of God in its fullness (1:25), they have the full riches of complete understanding in Christ (2) and have been given fullness in Christ (10). Humans, however, are notorious for being taken in by appearances and high-sounding drivel. This philosophy can captivate people and beguile them into thinking that it contains the truth.

What is the philosophy of your life? Does your belief system effect your

conduct? I only ask because it has often been my experience that what I see a person do (or hear that they do) is in direct conflict with what they say they believe. They fail to realize exactly Who this Jesus is that they claim to have received. He's not a buddy or a chum – He's the Lord of your life and the King of your heart and our daily conduct should reflect that overarching reality. 😊