

The Short Version of the Christian Life

Colossians: Christ Above All

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Bible Text: Colossians 2:1-7
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Our text this evening comes from Colossians 2:1-7. Our text this evening is verses 6 and 7 but our Scripture reading will be verses 1 through 7.

1 For I want you to know what a huge struggle I have on your behalf and those in Laodicea, and as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, 2 that their hearts may be comforted, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the riches of full conviction brought by understanding, to deeper knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ Himself, 3 in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden away. 4 I say this in order that no one should delude you with plausible sounding speech. 5 For even if I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing and looking upon your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. 6 As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, go on walking in him, 7 having been rooted and being built up in him and more and more established with regard to the faith, even as you were taught, overflowing in thanksgiving.

There was that time when Zebulon Vance was running maybe for re-election for Senator in North Carolina and someone asked him his view at that time of the policy of prohibition and he said he would answer it directly, he said, "My head is strongly inclined toward the great policy of prohibition but my stomach yearns the other way. I can therefore truthfully say that I am divided on the issue." And that's the way scholars are in regard to Colossians 2:6 and 7, they are divided. Some of them think that it goes with what precedes verse 6 primarily, verses 1 to 5; others think that it goes more with what follows and so sometimes you'll see that even represented in some of your English translations, the way they're printed, and they indicate how the translators thought verses 6 and 7 were connected. I tend to think that verses 6 and 7 connect more with what precedes, they tilt that way, as they begin, "As therefore you received Christ Jesus," etc. There seems to be a connection between 6 and what precedes. In any case, these two verses well summarize the basic teaching of the Colossian letter. That's what Dick Lukas says and he says, "What you have in verses 6 and 7 is a concise description of what is required of any church, in other words, verses 6 and 7 contain a short version of the Christian life."

Now, let's take a moment, though, and reset the context of this and catch up through verse 1 to 5; come back up to verses 6 and 7, as it were. As you begin chapter 2, Paul is on edge and he's uneasy over the settledness of the Colossians' faith, verses 1 and 2, and that anxiety surfaces again in verses 4 and 5. In verse 4, he speaks of their peril, and in verse 5, he speaks of his own longing. There were devious teachers at Colossae who spoke of, well, knowledge and wisdom, they spoke of mystery, they spoke of hidden things, they spoke of deeper truth, they spoke of more probably, things like completeness and that. They had a whole bag of their own buzzwords and their teaching that they were purveying, but even here as Paul in verses 1 to 5, even as Paul expresses his anxiety over these Colossian believers, he also nails down and provides an antidote for the false teaching that was going round Colossae as well.

You notice how he does that in the last of verse 2 and verse 3 where he says that he wants them "to come to a deeper knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ himself, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden away." All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in him and they are hidden away. Now you notice what he does there in verse 3, notice that he underlines the sufficiency of Jesus, that is, the complete adequacy of Christ: all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in him. Christ has the whole package. You don't need anything more. All the treasures are in him.

Then, secondly, he stresses the secrecy of Jesus: all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in him and they are hidden away. Maybe he's picking up on one of the key words of the false teachers: hidden. Hidden away. Now, what is that saying? Well, he's saying that that wisdom and knowledge is hidden away in Christ and that's an invitation to discover it by learning and experience; to discover the fresh and hidden depths about our Savior. It's as if there's something there that's hidden for you to discover. You see it's as if when Paul says, "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Christ," the "all" is assuring, the "hidden" is tantalizing, we might say even tempting. It's as if he is saying, "You go on discovering more and more of Jesus." All the treasures are there and they are hidden away as if luring you to discover them, and that's so true of Jesus, isn't it? There's always a freshness about Jesus. There's always more that you haven't seen before. The treasures are hidden away in him and God, as it were, tempts you to discover more and more of those treasures. So you don't need, Paul says, any deeper knowledge propaganda, if you have Jesus, you have all the depth you'll ever need.

Now then, we come up to this succinct summary in verses 6 and 7 that Paul gives. How does Paul want them to go on? What should their Christian life consist of? And he gives us, I think, direction in verses 6 and 7, our text. Well, what does, ought the Christian life consist of? Well, first of all, consistency. Verse 6, consistency. "As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, go on walking in him." Now, there are two verbs, of course, in verse 6, one is the verb "received," it means "a one time affair." You decisively receive Christ Jesus the Lord. And the next verb is a continuous tense, "as you received him, go on walking in him."

Now, this verb "received" is a word that sometimes means "to receive a body of tradition or a body of teaching," but you notice that here the object is not teaching or tradition, the object is a personal object, it's Christ Jesus the Lord. He received him. Now, not merely doctrine but there's a person received. Who is it who is received? Now, I think we need to maybe do a little bit of different translating here in verse 6. If you had your antenna up this morning with Dr. Thomas' exposition in Mark 8, you realize that sometimes when you have Christ or the Christ, it's not a personal name so much as a title. Sometimes it's used as a title, the Christ, that is, the Messiah, or the anointed one, and I think sometimes in the epistles you run into the term Christ with the definite article, the Christ, and sometimes it's meant to be not just a personal name like Christ Jesus but meant to be a title and I think that's the case here in Colossians 2:6, "As therefore you received the Messiah Jesus the Lord, go on walking in him."

So who is it that you've received? Well, you've received the Messiah. That's the title of what, of whom? The promised King of David's line who is destined to rule the nations, Psalm 2. That's who you receive. You also receive the Messiah Jesus the Lord. "Jesus" means "Savior," doesn't it? But it means more, doesn't it? It's his human name and it tells us that we receive and have in Jesus a genuine man who shares our condition and stands beside us in our troubles and we receive Jesus the Lord. "Lord" means that he's in a category of deity and supremacy. To call Jesus "Lord" is to say he's the sovereign deity who is in control and reigns over all powers visible and invisible and who demands our submission because he's Lord, he's boss, and so on. So when you receive Christ, you receive not some nebulous blob, you receive a clearly defined person, the Messiah Jesus the Lord.

Now, note that you receive all of him. Maybe this is just a matter, by the way, but I think it's worth pointing out. Sometimes there are, depending on what circles you operate in and so on, but sometimes you'll hear somebody perhaps say something like, "Well, So-and-so has received Jesus as his Savior but not as his Lord and that happens sometimes later." No, no, no. You notice that you receive the Messiah Jesus the Lord. You receive the whole package, you might say. There is no optional matter. Sometimes people think, "Well, you can receive Jesus as your Savior but receiving him as Lord is an extra-special step beyond that, it's sort of like an extended service agreement on a major appliance. You can take it if you want it but you can opt out of it." No, no, no, no. You don't receive and when you receive Jesus, you don't receive a schizophrenic. You don't receive a Savior who's not Lord. You receive the Messiah Jesus the Lord. And precisely as Dick Lukas says, because he's the Lord and has conquered all evil and malign powers because he's the Lord, that's precisely the reason he can be Savior and rescue you. You know, you get the whole package when you receive Jesus.

Now, you look back there at the text again and you notice that when you receive, "As therefore you received the Messiah Jesus the Lord, go on walking in him." That receiving brings about a relation. You are then in him. You are united to him. But the point of verse 6 is you don't deviate from how you began. As you received, you go on walking in him. You don't switch over to a different Jesus. There is a consistency. There is a continuity. As you received, so you stick with him. You go on walking in him. Consistency.

It's been about six months at least now since I've mentioned the great movie "Hoosiers," a basketball movie that was made back in about 1985 or so. But the fellows who produced, not produced but who were behind "Hoosiers," the two guys who kind of wrote it and were the driving force behind it, found that whoever it was that was going to be filming it wanted to film this in Canada. Now, Hoosiers obviously is about a basketball team in Indiana. The filming would have been much cheaper in Canada. There were certain breaks and so on and they could re-create Indiana looking scenery in Canada and so on but these fellows said, "No. You need to understand that if you really understand Indiana basketball, this movie has to be filmed in Indiana." So they stuck with that and it took place in about 1951, didn't it? So that meant that there couldn't be any newspaper delivery boxes visible so they pulled those up wherever they were in the town where it was filmed and there couldn't be any unleaded gasoline pumps seen, there couldn't be any Coke cans sitting around. It had to be 1951ish; it had to be consistent. One of the fellows who was one of the actors playing a basketball player said that he had to discipline himself because in 1985, he was used to dribbling between his legs and behind his back and dunking and none of that could be done and when you shot, you didn't do a jump shot, it was always mostly at that time set shots so you had to make sure you played consistently with 1951ish expectations and so on. There had to be a consistency there. You had to carry it through all along the line.

That's sort of Paul's point in verse 6, as you've received Christ, go on walking in him. Stick with him. Keep plugging on with the Christ you received. Keep going on in communion with this Jesus. It's the same sense, the same meaning really that you have in a familiar passage in Jesus' teaching in John 15. You may remember verses 4 and 5 of John 15 where he says, "Remain in me and I in you as the branch is not able to bear fruit from itself except it abide in the vine, so no more can you unless you abide in me. I'm the vine, you are the branches. The one who abides in me and I in him, he is the one who brings forth much fruit." Abide in me and sometimes we tend to think, "Oh, what does it mean to abide in Christ? That must be some sort of special kind of affair. How do we do that?" But the word is simply the verb "remain." That's all Jesus is saying, "Remain in me. Stay where you are." There's not some super-spiritually charged element in this idea of abide, it's just remaining. "Stay in me. Stay with me. Don't go away from me. As you've received Christ Jesus, go on walking in him." There is a consistency. Abiding in Christ is not some spiritual technique that has a warm spiritual glow around it, it's just staying in Christ and with Christ. So consistency, you might even say tenacity, is a mark of the Christian life.

Now, a second mark of the Christian life. How does that consistency maintain? And that's where you have stability, the first of verse 7 where Paul says, "go on walking in him, having been rooted and being built up in him and more and more established with regard to the faith, even as you were taught." Now you have this sense of stability just in the verbs there. There are three participles there; one seems to have maybe originally a kind of an agricultural setting, being rooted; and then one may have an architectural setting, being built up in him; and then, of course, being more and more established. But all of this speaks of stability and steadfastness and so on.

Now, one thing I want you to notice here is that there are two aspects of this, this stability. One aspect is the relational aspect. You see that in the first of verse 7, "being rooted and built up in him." You notice the "in him," that is, in union with Christ in a living, nurturing relation. That means that you are rooted and you are continually built up in him. It means that Jesus is the one who sustains and who anchors and who gives you that stability because when you are in him, he communicates his life and vitality and strength to you, so there's that relational aspect to this stability.

But then there's another aspect, there's the instructional aspect, the last of verse 7, or the middle part, "and being more and more established with regard to the faith, even as you were taught." This somehow feeds into the stability. Now, when he says, "more and more established with regard to the faith," the idea here is probably not faith in the personal sense of faith in Jesus but the faith, as we sometimes speak of it, that is, what it is that we believe; the content of our faith; the content of what we believe, for instance, about Jesus in his person and work and so on.

So being more and more established with regard to the faith, how do you get that establishing? "Even as you were taught." Oh, there was doctrinal teaching that helps you become stable, that keeps you steady. So teaching clarifies all that Christ is and points you to the pitfalls of false teaching about him. Now do you see what gives Christians steadiness then? On the one hand, there's a living relation; you are rooted and being built up in him. There is a living relation. And there's also doctrinal content; you're established regarding the faith, even as you were taught. Both aspects and the go together.

Now, so in other words, you have these two elements that lead into stability: you're united to Christ and you're instructed in doctrine. Both of them. One is experiential, one is instructional. You are given stability by Jesus' sustenance, this is where the Colossians anyway, by Jesus' sustenance and by Epaphrus' teaching because he was the one that first evangelized them. Both those elements go together. You don't play them off against each other.

When I was a lad, my father had an old Chevy and then every once in a while it needed a little work done on it and we lived in a small town in western Pennsylvania and there was another small town in western Pennsylvania about 14 miles away where he knew a mechanic by the name of Clarence Greenley. So when there was some need for Pop to take his car into the garage, he would go up to Clarence Greenley's garage and I always liked to go with him. We would hop in the car and we would go up to this town and you come across a bridge as you enter the town, over a creek and this bridge had a steel floor in it and your tires would hum briefly as you went over it and off we would go on up the street, turn right and go out to Clarence Greenley's garage. Now, that wasn't too bad for, I don't know, 6, 7, 8 year old hanging around the garage. There were always other cars there. There were interesting things going on and we would wait while Clarence or one of his men worked on the car. It might be two hours, it might be three hours, but when it was over, we'd get in the car and we would go back home. We would go down to the light, we would turn left and we would go back out toward that bridge with the steel floor

in it and just before we got to that bridge, Pop would pull off and park on the side of the street and we would get out of the car and we would walk across the street to a place called "Vengold Ice Cream." That was a nice little place because, and we date ourselves, now at that time you could get two scoops for ten cents in a cone and Pop would always have vanilla and I always ventured usually with something else but we would each get an ice cream cone.

That just went along, that was part of the package. There was Clarence Greenley's garage and there was Vengold ice cream and they always went together and here you have stability and what gives stability? There is this relational aspect that you were in Jesus and because of that lively relation, he sustains and he supports and there's also this instructional aspect that you have been taught and you don't demean that either. They go together if you're going to have Christian stability. If you have the relational without the instructional, you may have empty emotionalism. You may just be cuddling up with a "me and Jesus" attitude. And if you had the instructional without the relational, you may have a sterile barrenness. So what is it that keeps you steady? What gives you stability in the Christian life? The life of Jesus sustains and fortifies you because you are in him and the truth about Jesus steadies you as Christ's servants bulk you up in your understanding of your Savior. Stability.

So consistency and stability and then, of course, there's a third mark of the Christian life here and that is memory. Memory. The last of verse 7, "overflowing in thanksgiving." Overflowing in thanksgiving. Dick Lukas again says Paul here may be using the lingo of the false teachers at Colossae. They may have spoken of the overflowing life and so on and so Paul may be feeding this back into their teeth, as it were. We don't know for sure but in any case, this is what Paul wants of Christ's people, that they be overflowing in thanksgiving. Now, there's a recognition beneath this. No one is more susceptible to falling away from Christ than someone with an unthankful heart and nothing is so attractive and nothing is so indicative of a genuinely changed person as the presence of thanksgiving.

It was John Wesley who about 1725, oh, he was very religious at that time, he hadn't been converted yet, but Wesley was at Oxford at one of the colleges there and he was still stuck in his religious duties and so on but he hadn't been transformed by the Spirit of God yet, but he was very impressed by the porter of his college, the doorkeeper for the college. Wesley discovered that this man had more in religion than Wesley himself had yet found. Wesley discovered that the man had only one coat and that nothing had passed his lips on that particular day save a drink of water and yet his heart was full of gratitude to God so Wesley asked him, he said, "You thank God when you have nothing to wear, nothing to eat, and no bed to lie upon. What else do you thank him for?" "I thank him," the porter answered, "that he has given me my life and being and a heart to love him and a desire to serve him."

That's a genuine believing man who has that kind of gratitude and the peril, of course, for us is that we may not keep fresh the memory of Christ's mercies. You see, gratitude and thanksgiving presupposes that it feeds on memory. Overflowing in thanksgiving, and this

is not some optional extra, this is an essential ingredient in a proper Christian life. It's what Paul hammers home. He already did it in chapter 1, verse 12, but you may remember to anticipate, you get into chapter 3 of Colossians and verses 15, 16, and 17, and what do you find? Do you notice how he machine-guns you with thanksgiving and gratitude? "Now let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts unto which also you were called in one body and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns and Spirit-given songs, singing with thanksgiving," or thankfulness, "in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Giving thanks. Bang, bang, bang, he hammers it home. It's not an option, it's essential and this is what keeps you tied to Christ. Thankfulness is the superglue that rivets you to the side of Christ and you forget it at your peril.

There's a story of a woman many years ago in the island of Mauritius which is an island in the Indian Ocean. You may already know of it, etc., so I don't need to tell you. I think it's east of Madagascar but don't hold me to it. At any rate, a number of years ago, maybe a couple of hundred years ago or something like that, there was a poor Negress on the island of Mauritius who was a slave and her daughter with her and her daughter was a slave, and this woman by saving and working, was able to get enough funds pulled together in order to buy the freedom of her daughter. So she did that. They were owned by a certain master and so she paid, this woman paid for her daughter's freedom to their common master and her daughter now was a free woman and the woman didn't have enough money to buy her own freedom but she was so delighted to purchase her daughter's freedom that to see her daughter walking at large with shoes on her feet, only free people were allowed to walk with shoes, slaves couldn't walk in shoes, but here was her daughter who could walk in shoes and son on and she was free at last.

Well, it was sometimes after that, not long after it, that this affectionate mother happened to be coming into a room where her daughter was sitting and, as usual, she sat down beside her daughter and it was just a moment or two after that that the daughter turned around in a rage and rebuked her mother and explained, "How dare you sit down in my presence! Do you not know that I'm a free woman and you are a slave! Rise instantly and leave the room!" It was an ingrate who forgot the price that had been paid and who had forgotten who had paid it.

You dare not do that, rather you need to say,

"King of my life, I crown Thee now,
Thine shall the glory be,
Lest I forget Thy thorn-crowned brow,
Lead me to Calvary.

"Lest I forget Gethsemane,
Lest I forget Thine agony,
Lest I forget Thy love for me,
Lead me to Calvary."

Overflowing with thanksgiving, a grateful heart, that will be what will keep you from walking away from Christ.

So what is Paul saying to us in essence from this short version of the Christian life? I think you could sum it up this way, he's saying something like this: to make progress, stay where you are.

Now, Father, we pray that you would break open the treasures that are in Christ Jesus that your people may plunder them and delight in him. We pray in our Savior's name. Amen.