

Walking, Rooted, Establisher in Christ

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. ⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits^[a] of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities^[b] and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.^[c]

What thing about your country do you take the most pride in? What is the thing that makes you happy you were born where you were born? I suppose a lot of people have things that they readily criticize about their country, but what are some things that make you proud to be from your country? Even though there are things that make us concerned for the future of our countries, we are all deeply connected to the place we are from. It forms a significant part of who we are. The “identity” that we share with our fellow countryman forms us. We cannot help it. We grow up hearing the same things...reading the same books...watching the same movies. We can remember the good and bad times over the course of our lives, and we share those memories with everyone who also lived through them. Even if we don’t realize it, we cherish our citizenship. Likewise for Christians, we have identity-forming things that we all share. We have the promises conferred upon us at our baptism, we can draw near to Christ when we share in his body and blood, and we live by faith in the Son of God.

In our text today, we are looking at a lengthy description of what being a Christian means. I don’t think there is a significant difference in what the Apostle Paul is trying to say to the church (from the first chapter of Colossians), but how he explains salvation is important. Paul is trying to motivate and prepare the church for the spiritual challenges that they will face. We saw in Colossians 1:28-2:1 that the Apostle is working hard to present the church mature in Christ. It seems to me that Paul believed that knowing Christ is the key to being mature. In Col 2:6-15, Paul is again returning to the person and work of Christ Jesus. This time Paul is giving much more detail about salvation. We are going to skip verse 8 this time and look at it with verses 16-23. The reason we are doing this is because this is how the AP looks at it himself. The one mention of the possible challenges to the church in verse 8 is swallowed up by the larger description of the work of Christ. Paul strove for the church to be established in Christ Jesus our Lord. It did not stop when someone made a profession of faith. Paul

wanted mature Christians filling all the churches spread throughout the Roman Empire. He knows that only the person (and church) rooted in Christ can stand firm. The person that stands firm in Christ Jesus has life, forgiveness, and a new citizenship.

In verses 6-7, Paul introduces the new section of his letter with a command. This is not a harsh command. He is encouraging them. He says "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." The encouragement is for them to walk, to be rooted, and built up in Christ Jesus. These three expressions are metaphors for maturity. Walking means living our lives in Christ. Rooted means having our lives growing out of the soil of God's grace. Built up means having that we have a proper foundation underneath us as we are built into maturity. These three metaphors imply strength, consistency, and vitality. No one pours money into a building they think is truly worthless. To have our lives rooted in Christ, we need be drinking deeply from the profound wells of God's Word. In order for us to walk faithfully in the world, we need to have the strength to stand up and a sense of where our feet should carry us.

Paul says that the Colossians were taught these things. I wonder what kinds of things they were taught back in the first century. For me it is an area that I still haven't been able to look into deeply. As I have time for personal study in the years to come, I plan to give more attention to the early church writers.

What we know from the NT is that the early disciples gathered daily to listen to teaching from the Apostles and to pray. They shared meals and helped one another. Beyond that I do not have a very clear picture. The encouragement from the AP was simple though. Just like what you were told from the beginning, continue doing those things and give thanks to God that you are in Christ Jesus the Lord. Thanksgiving is part of the Christian life that seems so natural. We give God thanks for everything. I have not met many Christians that did not regularly give thanks to God. The challenge of thanklessness is strongest when we have expectations of God's action on our behalf in a situation. If that doesn't happen or we don't get something we want we get angry toward God. Perhaps after a time of particular struggle, we receive some encouragement. Maybe we think that the encouragement is a bit late in coming, after all the difficulty is already passed. However, when we find ourselves on the other side of a difficult situation and we did not waiver in our faith or compromise our integrity, we should be thankful to the Lord for faithfully keeping us. Abounding in thanksgiving, we should grow up in the grace and knowledge of Christ Jesus. We should stand firm on the Word of God that we have been taught. Paul told the church to persevere in what they had been taught. Let us do the same. Amen? Amen!

Paul transitions from his command to be firmly established in Christ with a warning about the temptation of false teaching. That temptation is calling our attention away from Christ and his work on our behalf. Let us think together about Christ and his work of salvation.

The theology of Colossians 2:9-15 is clear to us and at the same time the way that the Holy Spirit inspired the words gives us some trouble. I say that the theology is clear to us because this passage makes it clear that salvation is a work of God. Moreover, we receive new life and forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus alone. We simply must not miss the main message here. Salvation is not found in

circumcision or baptism, but in Christ Jesus. When I say that the words of the text give us some trouble, I mean that mentioning circumcision and baptism is something that we are not as accustomed to do. For example, if/when you were to explain salvation to someone else, what would you say? What metaphors or similes would you use? I have tried to come up with a list of several examples of salvation images: freedom from the power of sin, recovery of sight, debt cancellation, new life, saved from drowning, washed in the blood of the lamb, bought back.... There are so many ways to give expression to the reality of salvation in Christ Jesus the Lord. Paul chooses to use circumcision and baptism here. What makes circumcision and baptism difficult for us is that we associate these things with our action and not with God's action. In Genesis 17, God commands Abraham to be circumcised and to have all his descendants circumcised (Gen 17: 10-11). God says that it is a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham.

In Deut 10:6, we read this, "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." Baptism is a bit more difficult because it is not commanded in the OT. However, the NT references to baptism give great spiritual weight to baptism.

John the Baptist is proclaiming "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" in Luke 3:3. Jesus says that we need to be "born of water and spirit" in John 3:5.

Peter says to the crowd on the day of Pentecost, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). In other words, baptism has heavy spiritual significance in the NT. Likewise circumcision takes on spiritual significance in the NT. Paul repeatedly compares merely external circumcision of the flesh to internal circumcision. This is the way that he uses it in Colossians 2:11. The question we must answer is this: is Paul actually talking about circumcision and baptism in this passage, or is he just using them the way we use other metaphors for salvation?

At a bare minimum, Paul is using circumcision and baptism as metaphors for God's work of salvation in Christ. There are a couple of textual clues that tell us that Paul is not elevating baptism to the means of salvation.

First he says that we are "raised with him **through faith** in the powerful working of God" in verse 12. And back in verse 7, Paul says "...established in the **faith**, just as you were taught..." The real challenge comes to us when we wonder why Paul isn't using a different metaphor for salvation. Why doesn't he use some of the ones common today? It seems to me that debt cancellation or being born again are clearer images of the powerful work of God.

Part of our problem is that we do not emphasize baptism like the early church did. Nor do we have major controversy about circumcision and Gentile inclusion in the church. I think we can see Jesus' words on being born of water and spirit in John 3 and Peter's words about baptism for the forgiveness of sins as examples of the different role baptism played among early Christians. Baptism is not a symbol of salvation as much as it is the manifestation of that salvation. We often see baptism as the work of man. This is the influence of Baptist theology on the global church. Yes, a believer must choose to be baptized. However, true baptism is applied like true circumcision is applied. It is done without hands. It is done by God. Faith in Christ plays a significant role, but faith alone doesn't baptize us. The application of water to a believer in Jesus marks that person out as one of God's people, but the water is performing a deeply spiritual task of washing that person's sins away. I want to be careful here not to

make it sound like a person cannot be saved apart from baptism. Baptism does not automatically save a person. However, the link between the outward action (water being applied to a person) and the internal reality is essential to the nature of baptism. Buried, washed, and raised to walk in newness of life is what happens in baptism. There is a promise in baptism. The promise is not in the water. The promise is in Christ Jesus. The power in baptism is not dependent on you or me. It is not dependent on the quality or holiness of the person performing the baptism. It is the work of God. Salvation is of the Lord from beginning to end. It is God's plan. It is Christ's work. It is the Holy Spirit's drawing a person to repentance and faith. It is the triune God that washes sinners clean from all sins and brings new life.

We cannot make baptism equal salvation, nor can we make baptism a mere metaphor for salvation. It is something deeper. This is what makes what Paul is saying in Colossians 2:9-15 more than word pictures. He is talking about the true spiritual mysteries of God in bringing salvation to the world. In Christ Jesus, we encounter God himself. When Paul says "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily," he is not making an analogy. He is speaking the deepest kind of truth that can be. He is saying that we cannot find another way to God. He is declaring again the full authority and power of Christ. If we want to know the true God, we go to Jesus because in him we find God. In Christ, we are changed. In Christ, we are filled. Filled with a new identity. On the outside, we are not changed. Our appearance will not change when we are filled by Christ. The change starts in our hearts. Circumcision takes place in the heart by the hands of God. There is a "putting off of the flesh." Paul uses the word "flesh" in different ways. Here he is referring to the parts of us that are dominated by sin. All of that is cut back and the powerful working of God takes place. We are buried with Christ and raised to walk in him. We are granted new life and forgiveness of sin. These are the real works of God. Christ's death on the cross crushed the power of sin over us.

Verse 14 says that Christ canceled "the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."

Salvation has come to the world in Christ Jesus the Lord. We must never mistake the way that it comes to us. It does not come to us when we are moral or upright in our lives. It does not come to us when we participate in religious rituals. We do not inherit it from other people. Salvation comes to us in Christ. That is the key phrase from this passage. "In Christ" In him, we meet God. In him, we are filled. In him, we are changed. In him, we are made alive. In him, we are forgiven. In him. In him. Do you think you would get tired of hearing these words? In Christ Jesus the Lord?

Have you thought much about what it means to be in Christ? For most people knowing the Lord is something that they do not ever think about. Life has enough going on without a spiritual being holding sway over their lives. Moreover, there are so many people ready to give easy answers to the sense of guilt and need we all have as humans. I am sure that you have heard of some of these things. "Religious ideas come from a primitive time." "Now we know better." "We are more sophisticated." "We have science." "We can make observations about the world around us." "We can cure diseases." "We can figure out how to solve big problems." Human beings have a lot going on, and people think that God is just in the way.

On the other hand, Christians say that in Christ there are things that you cannot get anywhere else. There is redemption in Christ. There is new life in Christ. There is a way of having our sins forgiven in

Christ. The call of the gospel is simple. Call on the name of Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. The call of the gospel is simple, but few people will really call on him. There are many reasons why this is true. First of all, not all hear the gospel and so fail to respond because they never hear the gospel. Another group may hear the gospel, but the gospel message cannot take root. The heart of man is so hard that even the most beautiful expression of love does not penetrate into the heart. Another group of people hear the gospel message and rejoice at what they hear. However, this group of people is constantly worried about what other people will think about them, and when difficulty comes they wither under other people's expectations. Yet another group of people exists. This group is worried about the things of this life, so that they end up slowly drifting away from Christ. There is another group of people though.

The human heart is full of all kinds of trickery and deceit. It is hard to predict what a person will do when they hear the gospel. If we are honest with ourselves it is hard to say what is going on in our own hearts. I will offer you all this encouragement: the human heart is prone to drifting away from the Lord, so you should rejoice that you are still being drawn to the Lord. If you find yourself wanting to hear about Christ and his work. If you want to know the Triune God. If you are interested in these spiritual matters, then you should give thanks to God. You may be part of this last group of people. You see it is the Lord that is going to soften your heart and train it to love. It is the Lord that will raise you up and allow the gospel to shape your life. When you hear the gospel and are drawn to it, come to Jesus. When you feel your heart growing cold, when doubts are assailing you, come to Jesus. In him and him alone, do we find all that we really need.

For those of you that are Christians, I have this encouragement for you. The world is behind you. We are on a journey through this life. There seems to be danger on every side. BUT we are in Christ, and he is in us. Through his death he has overcome the world. Through our union with Christ in baptism, we have triumphed with Christ over the world.

Colossians 2:15 says, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." The Triune God has put the powers to the test. They were no match for him. He has won the victory. In Christ, we share this victory. Yes, there may be many trials to come. If they killed our Savior they may kill us. However, he had the victory because he was just and innocent. In Christ, we are just and innocent. Let us trust Christ and be firm in him.