

Living and growing in Christ

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[0 : 00] Please turn to Colossians chapter 2.!

And I thought what we would do for these next two or three Sunday mornings is take the opportunity to go back to some basic things as we set out on a new year, just to encourage us and to remind us of some fundamental important things.

And I've given it the general title, Living and Growing in the Christian Life. Living and Growing in the Christian Life.

And just by way of explanation, I don't have very many visuals this morning, just have one sheet which is mostly the headings of what I'm going to say. Living and Growing in the Christian Life. Living in the Christian Life. Staying alive in the Christian Life. Keeping going in the Christian Life.

[1 : 24] I think that is a good thing to consider. Is that an issue? Well, yes it is. Because I can see many people wiser and stronger and more gifted than myself that have wobbled and stumbled and tripped over in the Christian life.

So just keeping on going is a worthwhile issue for us to think about. And growing as a Christian. Growing as a Christian.

Is that an issue? Well, yes it is. Because God's aim in making people Christians is not just numbers. God isn't simply concerned that he could say there are X thousand people in Brighton who have become Christians.

It isn't just the numbers but the type of people they are becoming. God is very interested in the sort of people we are and the sort of people we are turning into.

So we could say very simply. Are we becoming more like Jesus Christ? So it's not only keeping going but it is growing.

[2 : 42] Being changed. Transformation. Another way the Bible puts it is the fruit of the Spirit. Another idea from horticulture.

Bearing the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace. Long-suffering. Gentleness. Goodness. Meekness. Self-control. Faithfulness.

Jesus said I've appointed you to bear much fruit. So growing in 2013. Shall we be growing in the Christian life?

And you might say, well, the Christian life is all to do with God's grace. So can't I just leave that whole matter to God? To which I reply, it is God's grace.

But that doesn't mean that living and growing is something that happens on automatic. Salvation is the work of God. He gets 100% of the credit.

[3 : 44] He chooses people entirely at his own pleasure. He brings people to repentance and faith as he sees fit.

It's Jesus who died on the cross for our salvation. We don't contribute to that. He is the one who works to transform us into the likeness of his Son.

It's God by his grace who keeps us and brings us safe home to glory. This is all the work of God. But it would be a great mistake for us to think that the Christian life is a spectator sport.

In a spectator sport, you just sit and watch and somebody else does all the hard work. And you might cheer them at the end.

The Christian life is not a spectator sport where we just sit and watch God run the race for us. It isn't like that. Because one of the things God is intending to achieve is to make people to have children who are like him.

[4 : 57] That they are involved in his purposes. He wants us. He wants that involvement to be part of our character and make up.

So it doesn't happen just automatically. The Bible tells us to get involved actively and responsibly in living and growing in the Christian life.

So, let's think about this with Colossians 2 as our starting point. Colossians 2 verses 6 and 7.

Now, do you see that in your Bible there? Have you got a Bible you can look across at if you haven't got one yourself? Now then, let's make sure that we know what this text says.

So I invite us please to read out loud Colossians 2 verse 6. Reading it out loud together, I mean.

This is what it says. Ready? Together. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

[6 : 14] Now that's pretty much what we're going to look at this morning. Which says, what have I put? As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so continue to live in him, rooted and established in him, etc.

And it goes on in verse 8 to say, it doesn't happen automatically. You've got to see to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depend on human tradition and on the basic principles of this world, rather than Christ.

So he's saying that it doesn't just happen automatically. There are other ways of thinking and living, and you have to be careful that you don't get caught up in them.

Now then, I suggest that we look at it, or we notice that there are basically two things here. There is something about the past.

Do you notice there's a past tense? You received Christ as Lord. Another past tense, it says, as you were taught. And then there's a present, it says, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him.

[7 : 28] I suppose that's past, isn't it? Rooted and built up is past. Strengthened in the faith as you were taught. That's past. There's past and present, and we'll try and consider those together.

There's past and present, and there is also that warning, though we won't look so much at the warning. So let's, it's a very straightforward text.

Let's ask it a couple of questions, and that's what we're going to do this morning. So let's ask it a question about, what does it say about the past? We'll ask it what it says about the past, or what it says about the present.

What does it say about the past? The past. How you became a Christian. He says, first of all, look back on what happened in the past.

As you received Christ Jesus as Lord, so continue to live in him. Now, what happened in the past connects up exactly with how you're going to live in the present.

[8 : 32] So if you're going to live and grow in Christ, you've got to keep that connection between what happened and how you're living now. So we're going to look back at how, what he says about the past.

He says, what happened? Well, basically he says, you received Christ Jesus as Lord. What happened when you became a Christian?

You received Christ Jesus as Lord. So let's ponder that just for a moment. He says that when you became a Christian, you had a new relationship, or perhaps a set of new relationships, with Jesus Christ.

That's what he refers back to. He says, what happened? You received Christ Jesus as Lord. That's what happened when you became a Christian. Now, he could have said lots of things, and in other places he does say different things.

But I think it's worth pondering what he does not say. He does not say, well you guys, I know you've always really been Christians. He doesn't say that.

[9 : 46] And I don't think he would consider saying that. He says, you weren't Christians, and then there came a time when you received Christ Jesus as Lord.

That's when you became a Christian. So he doesn't say, all you guys, I know you've been Christians, you've always been Christians. That thought is more to do with nominal Christianity. The idea that if you are English, if you are born English, you are born Church of England. Or if you are born Greek, you are born Greek Orthodox.

Every country has its own sort of nominal form of Christianity. Scottish nominal Christianity is Presbyterianism. African nominal Christianity is Pentecostalism.

You don't become a Christian just by being born in a certain country from certain parents. You become a Christian by receiving Jesus Christ as Lord.

[11:00] What else doesn't he say? Well he doesn't say, I want you to look back on the amazing experience you had when you were overwhelmed with such and such an emotion.

Now he could have said that. And there are, to be sure, realities of the emotional experience involved with becoming a Christian.

But he doesn't choose to put his finger on that point. He says, what happened when you became a Christian was you received Jesus Christ as Lord.

And that is a good focus to have. In understanding your own spiritual life. Could you say there was a time, maybe I can or cannot identify it, but before that I had not received Jesus Christ as Lord.

And at some point I can say, I did or I must have, I received Jesus Christ as Lord. That's becoming a Christian.

[12:11] Another thing he doesn't say was, he doesn't say, you turned over a new leaf in your behaviour. Now certainly, when people become a Christian, their behaviour does change.

But he doesn't try to put his finger simply on your relationship to rules. He doesn't say, remember the time when you stopped smoking.

He doesn't put it that way. Or remember the time when you gave up, I don't know, going to the cinema or something like that. He doesn't say that's the way to think about the big change that happened.

That's the way to think about your identity as a Christian. What he says is, there was a time when you received Jesus Christ as Lord.

That's what it was to become a Christian. You see, he's relating it to the person of Jesus Christ. So, I ask that question of all of us, as we think about living and growing in the Christian life.

[13:13] Can we look back and understand a time and a point where we received Jesus Christ? Perhaps that you haven't yet done that.

Perhaps you're trying to live the Christian life without starting at the beginning. And if so, that's the business that you want to be about. You want to be about saying, Lord Jesus, how can I receive you as Lord?

Okay, that was my relationship with Jesus Christ. Let's ponder this word receive. It's a rather attractive word. To receive Jesus Christ as Lord.

I don't know about you. Over the Christmas period, lots of things came to the door from Amazon and eBay. And you get the postman comes along.

I think it always was a postman. It doesn't have to be a postman. But anyway. And they give you the package. Would you like to receive this?

[14:22] And you say, oh, it looks really interesting. This is obviously the 97 inch television that I've been expecting. And they give you this little machine.

Have you seen this little machine? It is a special machine which takes a person with adult abilities in writing and turns them into a three year old child.

Have you noticed that's what it does? You take your best writing and it looks as though you can hardly read or write. Anyway. But what they're saying is, will you receive this parcel?

They're asking you to do something that you're willing to do. You could say, I don't want this. I don't want this. I never asked for this. Nothing to do with me. Don't pin this one on me.

You know, whatever it might be. Set of deck chairs. Flimsily wrapped. I never asked for those. Take them away. He says, do you want to receive this? And as you sign, there's a certain sort of anticipation.

[15:24] You say, yes, I'm looking forward to opening this. Is that my signature? Anyway. You're receiving it. And Jesus Christ comes to us and we are to receive him.

And there's a certain sort of voluntariness about it. He, as it were, knocks at the door and says, will you receive me? He doesn't say, I'm going to push my way in.

I'm going to demand that I'm here whether you want me or not. It just doesn't work like that. He says, will you receive me? And I wonder whether you have ever, as it were, gone to the door and said, yes, I will.

As Jesus offers himself, you said, perhaps, no, I don't want you. Nothing to do with me. Go away. Or whether you've said, yes, come in.

Definitely. I am willing and glad to receive you. I do not reject you, but receive you. So receiving is part of that. Let's think a little bit more about who is being received.

[16:30] He says, you received Christ Jesus as Lord. We'll come to the Lord bit in a moment, but let's think of the Christ bit. The Christ that Paul describes is the Christ who died on the cross for our salvation.

There isn't any other Jesus Christ. He doesn't say it in that text, but he does say it. He's been speaking that way all along. If you care to look back to chapter 1, verse 14, he talks about Jesus, the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

So Jesus is the one who brings redemption, the forgiveness of sins. And in chapter 1, verse 20, he talks about Jesus Christ.

He says he was making peace, end of verse 20, through his blood shed on the cross. That's the Jesus Christ who we're talking about, the one who shed his blood and made peace through doing so.

In 1.24, he talks about the suffering of Christ. What is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions. Now, whatever else he's saying there, he's saying that Christ suffered.

[17:59] The Christ he's talking about suffered on the cross, died on the cross. In chapter 2, verse 13, he talks about when you were dead in your sins.

It goes on to say, he forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code with its regulations that stood against us and stood opposed to us.

He took it away, nailing it to the cross. He says that this is the Jesus Christ. He died on the cross. He brings redemption.

He brings forgiveness. He cancels the accusations that are against us. This is the Jesus Christ whom we receive.

You see, he's saying when you receive Jesus Christ, he's saying receive Jesus Christ, as Calvin would have put it, clothed in all his promises.

[18:59] All the things that are to do with Jesus, all that he achieved, all that he offers, all that he brings. When you receive Christ Jesus, you receive the whole package.

You receive him and all that he brings with us. And that's very important. Because when we first came to Christ, we came needing forgiveness and valuing forgiveness and experiencing forgiveness.

And when that first comes, I mean, people are all wired up different people's situations are different. But that initial understanding of forgiveness can be immensely powerful.

That all the guilt, all the burden, all the stain, gone, removed.

The burden, gone. The sense of being all screwed up and tightened up, released. The sense of stain, cleansed. That's how you received Jesus Christ and all that he brings.

[20:17] And I think one thing he's saying is, you've got to continue in that. You won't keep on and you won't grow as a Christian if you leave that idea behind.

He says, as you received him, continue to live. And an important part of the way we live and grow as Christians is to keep on being conscious of our sin and to keep on coming back to Jesus Christ for cleansing.

And to keep on remembering the wonder, the value, the glory, the grace of being forgiven. So we receive Jesus Christ who died on the cross.

And furthermore, he says, you received Christ Jesus as Lord. The way the translation operates there, it seems to put quite an emphasis on that.

How did you receive Christ Jesus? Well, you received him as Lord. I've been to suggest it probably over-emphasizes that. But it's certainly there. Who did you receive?

[21:31] You received the Saviour. Who did you receive? You received the Lord. And that is how you started the Christian life, if indeed you started it.

And I want to ponder that just for a moment. What does it mean for Jesus Christ to be Lord? Well, it means that I am saying to Jesus Christ, whatever you say, whatever you want, I will fall in with that. You were in charge. Whatever you tell me to do, I will do it, as you help me, but it's my job to do it. Whatever you tell me, I'll believe it.

Whatever you ask of me, I will give it, because you are Lord. And it may well be that when you received Jesus Christ as Lord, that that was actually taking a huge step.

Because it is a huge step. Because as human beings, we naturally want to hold on to our lives ourselves, and make our own minds up about things, and to have Jesus Christ as Lord means in every way to say no to that.

[22 : 51] We say no to ourselves, but we don't say no to the Lord. There's actually points in the Bible where Jesus says something to somebody.

I think Peter's an example of this. And he says, no, Lord. Do you remember that, where Jesus says, which bit is it, where he says that he's going to, the Son of Man must suffer many things, and then Peter says, no, Lord.

He's going to deny the Lord. It might be. I was thinking of a bit earlier on, where, who do people say the Son of Man is, and he's the Christ, and then he says the Christ must suffer.

I think it's there that he says no, Lord. I'm sure there are more than one occasion. But if you just think about it, you can't put those two words together, can you? Not really.

You can't put those two words together. Because it doesn't make sense. If he's Lord, you can't say no to him. And I know this is a very simple point, but it's very well worth reminding ourselves of.

[24 : 02] That's how we started the Christian life. If indeed you have started the Christian life, by saying yes to the Lord. And if you've never done so, now is the time to do it.

Well, actually, it won't take you a moment, it will take you quite a while, to work out what that means. Because you're saying to the Lord, just everything in my life, all the things that I'm conscious of at the moment, and then all the things that I might like to think about a little bit further, my hopes, my relationships, my plans, my fears, my desires, all of that, all of it, comes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

That's what it takes when you become a Christian, and if we're going to live and grow as Christians, we need to continue in that exact position.

And maybe it's just me, but I don't think that that's a trivial point. I think that the issues that we might have faced when we first came to Christ, and we said, yes, the Lord is Lord over all of that, I think issues move on.

If you came to Christ when you were younger, you probably were penniless. So, Lordship over the £2.50 that you had, was a fairly trivial matter, but now you're older, you might have a lot more than £2.50.

[25 : 41] And Christ is to be Lord over an area of life which has changed, and so on. As you received Christ Jesus as Lord, so continue to live in Him.

The Lordship of Jesus Christ. And one other point on this. He says, you received Christ Jesus as Lord. How did you receive Him?

It says, towards the end of the verse, strengthened in the faith as you were taught. And again, I think he is referring back, isn't he?

He's saying, you became a Christian through being taught, and the teaching brought you to faith. faith. And that's what it was all about.

You responded in faith to the things you were taught. And I just pause to say, maybe, as you're sitting listening, you're thinking, well, I haven't even started.

[26 : 53] And you, where do I start? And here's a starting point. It is the things that you are taught, and whether you're going to receive them in faith.

Let me give you some examples. So, we're taught that God, about God, that God is our maker and our sustainer, and He is in charge of everything.

And we're taught that, and in faith we might say, yes, I'll accept that. Yes, I believe in God. And then, we're taught about Jesus Christ. We're taught that He died on the cross for our forgiveness, for our redemption, for our salvation.

And we might say, yes, I've been taught that, I don't disagree with that, I accept that, and believe that. And, we might, we've been taught about Jesus rising from the dead, and as it says here, He's seated at the right hand of God.

And we're taught that, and we might say, that's a very marvellous thing to say about Jesus, but I don't disbelieve it, I believe that. That's what I've been taught, it's there in the Bible, and I've been taught that, and I believe it.

[28 : 09] And then you might be taught, or ought to be taught, about the cleansing that He offers to sinners. And then it becomes a little bit more near to home to start to believe that, because what you're saying is that I, I accept that I'm a sinner, and I accept that I need Jesus Christ as my Saviour.

And when He says He offers Himself to me, for me to receive Him, I'm going to say yes to that, and I'm going to trust my soul, my eternal well-being, all that I am, I'm going to entrust that all to Him.

And you've been taught it, and faith is not just believing something to be true, but it's actually, it has a bit of commitment in it, doesn't it? Say, yes, I will go for that.

I will accept the repercussions of that. I'll live my life on the basis of that. And then, as we've just said, we're taught about His Lordship. We're taught that if we're to relate to Him, we must be His servants, and He is our Master.

and we respond in faith and we say, yes, Lord, that's what I want it to be. Now, all those things, the faith that you've been taught, those things that you say a wholehearted yes to, that is what He says happened.

[29 : 36] And again, I say, if you never got to that starting point, well, that's where you start. You take on board the things that are taught and you say yes in faith to them.

And please don't think that those are trivial things to say yes to. You need to do real heart business with God to be able to say yes to all those things.

And if you've never done so, please do so. So that was the past. Let's look at the present. As you received Christ Jesus as Lord, so continue to live in Him.

Now, in actually, literally, in the original, it says, so walk in Him. Which is another rather nice picture. I rather like the Bible idea of walking.

I like walking. It's rather nice to walk with somebody because of the companionship you have on the way and the idea that it doesn't involve all the effort of running and sprinting, jarring your knees and all that sort of thing.

[30 : 43] It's just walking. As you received Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk in Him. And let's have a little look just for a few moments at what He says about this.

So this is the soil in which we grow. And He actually says, what does He say? He says, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught.

I'll just stick to those bits. This is the soil in which the Christian life grows. And just as you can't really plant seeds in muesli, you can't grow the Christian life in any other soil than this.

And this, the this is really Jesus Christ. Let's look at the things that He says. Number one, rooted. Rooted in Him.

Rooted is an idea from horticulture. Is that the right word? Horticulture? Growing plants? Yeah, I think horticulture. And a root, and that's the word he uses, *rhizome*, which I think you get *rhizome*.

[32 : 05] Is *rhizome* a technical word for a root in English? May or may not be. He uses, he's actually using this idea of a root.

And what is a root? It's a place where a plant is anchored. So when you were a child, did you grow those beans?

Put them on blotting paper. Did you do this, Matthew? Did you grow a bean? And then you see the little root going down, the little shoot going up? No. This is an honest answer.

Anybody ever done that sort of thing? Yes, I've done that. And of course the temptation is to see whether it's growing and you pick it out and you destroy the root.

It's important for the root to go down and that's how the plant grows. Interestingly, the idea is used in the Psalms.

[33 : 05] The idea is used, although not the word, where it says in the first Psalm, I'm sure I have got Psalms in my Bible. Yes, it had just moved into the wrong place.

The man who meditates in the law of the Lord is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season whose leaf does not wither whatever he does prospers.

It doesn't say root, but it's the idea, isn't it? If you put a tree by streams of water it's good for the roots, isn't it? It's good for the roots because the roots can draw up all the nutrients and all the sustenance from the damp ground where it's been planted.

Jesus used the idea of root, didn't he? If I can, no I didn't write the reference. Remember I'm talking about the seeds that were sown in different places and there were seeds sown on rocky ground.

Do you remember that? I'm sure I wrote this down but I can't find it. On the rocky ground, the seed lands on the rocky ground, it springs up straight away but when the sun comes out it shrivels up because, do you remember the because of this?

[34 : 32] Because it has no root. Because it has no root. It dies. And Jesus compares that with the Christian life and he says, this is like people who hear the word with great joy but when persecution comes or affliction or it gets tough and difficult they fall away because they have no root.

The importance of roots in the Christian life and our roots according to this are to be in Jesus Christ. Where are your roots?

Where do you draw your sustenance from? Because the Bible is saying if you want to live and grow as a Christian your root needs to be Jesus Christ.

And in Colossians that is one of the things that he's trying to teach them about because as I mentioned before there are other places you can put your roots.

In chapter 2 verse 8 he talks about the basic principles of this world. The things everybody says, well everybody knows that. Everybody knows if you can, well all sorts of things everybody knows which aren't to do with Jesus Christ.

[35 : 51] He says if you put your roots in what everybody knows and everybody else does, you won't live and grow as a Christian. You need to put your roots down in Jesus Christ. He also in chapter 2 verse 19 he talks about people whose religious life is all to do with the worship of angels.

He talks about that in chapter 2 verse 18 they worship angels go into great details of all the wonderful things they've seen. He says but this person that's where he's rooted in all that sort of stuff his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions he has lost connection with the head. He's lost connection with Jesus Christ because that's where your roots ought to be. Think of lots of ways that we grow our take our sustenance and he says make sure that of all those ways actually your roots are in Jesus Christ.

Second thing that he says is foundation. Now the word is translated built up in him and I looked it up the word is made up of a couple of things it means upon and then it's a word for housing or how you build houses.

So I would suggest and it is a suggestion and I could be wrong I won't go to the stake for getting this right or wrong but if we invented a word because you can always invent words and you can invent words nowadays people do a lot of words that are nouns that become verbs.

[37 : 48] They do. I'll try not to think of any examples but I'm going to make one up like this foundation turned into a verb foundation foundation in Jesus Christ rooted in Christ and foundation in Jesus Christ that idea of foundation and there's this other word strengthened which I've missed out in my notes but I looked this up strengthened is a word which it's not to do with strength like that it's to do with certainty and being anchored firmly somewhere confirmed that sort of thing can I think of another word for that confirmed established run out of ideas on that but so let's put those two together foundationed in Jesus Christ confirmed in Jesus

Christ oh I know what I was going to say yeah that confirmed word is made up of several words and if you trace them back it actually comes to the word foot rather odd and here's a suggestion it's not a scientific accurate thing but if we were to think of what gives you a solid footing what gives you something firm ground under your feet that would be the right sort of idea and he says foundationed in Jesus Christ with your footings in Jesus Christ with Jesus Christ putting the solid ground under your feet that idea he says that's how you live and grow as a Christian rooted and built up on him and that's a picture that Jesus himself uses not quite in the same way but I think that will be familiar to you two men building two houses one house built on sand the other house built on rock and he says this is the way life is sooner or later the winds come the rains come the storm comes and beats upon the house at some point or another we'll all have that on our lives things that come and one house falls over the other house stands firm and which one's which which one falls over and which one stays firm the house on the sand falls down and the house on the rock stays firm and it's to do with foundations isn't it it's to do not to do with the house building but what you build on the foundation and he's saying he's saying here that

Jesus Christ is the foundation for us to build our lives on as you receive Jesus Christ and you started building on him so continue to build your life on him there are all sorts of things offered to us as the foundations that we need for our lives don't know if you ever thought caught yourself thinking things like this I would be able to live and grow as a Christian if only I had the foundation of a decent job with a decent salary then I would be okay and the bible says that's not the foundation to build your life on Jesus is the foundation you live and grow with Jesus as the foundation have you ever caught yourself saying or having said if only if only I could get the right man stroke woman to marry me then my life would be sorted out and I'd be able to live and grow as a

Christian and the bible says it's a great gift to have the right man or woman to be married to but that's not the foundation that you build your life on because Jesus is the foundation you build your life on have you ever caught yourself saying if only I had a nice family like other people then I could

live the Christian life and Jesus says that's actually not the issue the issue is Jesus Christ as the root and the foundation if only I had decent health then I'd be able to serve the Lord and he says no that's not the key issue the key issue is whether Jesus Christ is the root that you draw from and the foundation that you build on nothing else is adequate to build our lives on nothing else is adequate for us to live and grow in the

Christian life and that is what we have been thinking about this morning which is summarized exactly in the words of Paul as you received Jesus Christ the Lord so continue to live in him rooted and built up in him strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness let's sing together a