

Continue to Walk in Him

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[0 : 00] So we're at point one in your outlines and chapter two, verse six in your Bibles. Have a look there. He says, so then, just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live or literally walk in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith that you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness.

And notice the instruction. It says in our Bibles to continue to live your lives. But literally, it says to walk, continue to walk in him. And this instruction, he really summarizes the rest of the letter, which is why I've called the series Continue to Walk in Him.

But before we look at this instruction a little bit more, notice what has happened first to the Colossians. It says in verse number six that they have received Christ Jesus as Lord. In other words, they've become Christians.

You see, to receive Christ Jesus as Lord is to hear the teaching about Jesus and the teaching that tells us what happened in history and where Jesus died on a cross there to pay for our sins.

And that he rose again from the dead, which we have historical evidence for, proving that he is Lord. And so that everyone who believes in him can be forgiven and given life eternal in heaven.

[1 : 18] That's the Christian message. That's the teaching about Jesus the Colossians heard. But to receive Christ Jesus as Lord is not only to hear that message with your ears, it's also to believe that message with your heart, to accept it.

That's what makes someone a Christian. And that's what the Colossians have done. They heard the message from this guy called Epaphras, chapter one, verse seven, who was also from the city of Colossae. But they didn't just hear it.

They believed it. That is, they put their trust in Jesus. They trusted that Jesus paid for their sins and would bring them to heaven. And they trusted Jesus to be their Lord, the one who would direct their life.

They received Christ Jesus as Lord. And I wonder if you're here this morning, I wonder if you've done that. I mean, you've just heard with your ears that Jesus died to pay for our sins and rose to prove that he's Lord.

But have you believed it in your heart? If you do, then you can be certain of forgiveness now and certain of heaven later. If you don't, then the Bible says you won't have either.

[2 : 26] So have you received Christ Jesus as Lord? Well, the Colossians have. And so now Paul gives them his first instruction. He says, so continue to live or literally walk in him.

The Bible, the New Testament was originally written in the Greek language. And our English versions have tried to capture the sense by using the word live. But it's literally walk.

And there is a difference. I mean, you can live just by sitting here. You know, you're living now, just sitting here. It's almost passive. But here, to walk means to move forward, to progress, to grow, to live out our lives, if you like, in Christ.

That's what Paul means here. And how do we do that? Well, it means to walk in his footsteps. It means to follow or walk in Christ's ways. It means to walk like Jesus.

And the rest of the letter will give us specific examples of how to walk like Jesus. For example, in chapter 3, we're told to clothe ourselves with humility and kindness, which were characteristics of Jesus.

[3 : 31] In fact, chapter 3, verse 10, Paul will talk about being renewed to reflect the image of our creator. And we've already heard in chapter 1 that Christ is the perfect image of our creator.

And so what's happening is God is renewing, working in us to make us like Jesus. And so reflect our creator as we were intended or made to do. But we'll see more of that next week.

And this week, here's the thing to notice. We had a walk in him and not some other teaching. As we're about to see, the Colossians were being told that they needed to follow other teachings, apart from the teaching that they had received.

They were being told to follow other philosophies and visions and so on. But Paul's point here is that just as you became Christians by receiving Christ and not some other teaching, so you continue to walk or grow as Christians in Christ and not some other teaching.

See, Paul's point here is that we continue as Christians the same way we started in Christ. We don't do what the Israelites did in our first reading, where they started off following God and then decided to add something else to God, you know, a golden idol from all their earrings.

[4 : 50] It's a lot of earrings. Or maybe a very small idol, I'm not sure which. They started off with God and then added to it some idols and statues. But we're not to do that.

We never graduate from the gospel onto some other teaching or add something new to Christ. Rather, we grow deeper in Christ. We know him more and try and work at living like him more. And that's what Paul is saying in the rest of verse 7. Do you see there? He says, Having been rooted and built up in him, being strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

I'm not much of a gardener. In fact, when I was at Bible college, some church people hired me to weed their garden to give me some cash as a poor student.

But when they came home, they were horrified because I'd pulled out some of their favorite plants, thinking they were weeds. It was the last time they ever hired me to do any gardening work. But even I know as a poor gardener that if trees are to grow, then their roots need to remain in good soil.

[5 : 59] And so just to kind of really ram it home, here we go. It's kind of like this. So here's a tree. Here's the soil, Christ. And if this tree is to grow, we need to keep it in this soil.

That's what Paul is saying. It's rooted already in Christ. That's how you start as a Christian. And it needs to stay here. The thing is, if we add some other teaching, if we try and grow in something else, it's like we, well, we get this out.

Let's get out of Christ. And we'll, I'll vacuum it later. It's okay. And then we'll take our roots and we'll plonk it in there. But what we've done is we've taken it out of the soil that gave us new spiritual life. And now it just sits in an empty plastic box. And after a while, we'll die. That's what Paul is saying. You add any other teaching to Christ, you move your roots out of Christ where they are, the one who gave you new life, then you're going to end up dying.

And so Paul says, don't let that happen. Don't be taken captive by these other philosophies, these other teachings. Point two, verse eight. He says, see to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spirits of the forces, whether it's kind of ancestor worship or something like that.

[7 : 18] Don't be, you know, misdirected by that stuff rather than depending on Christ. See, in the church at Colossae, there were false teachers saying that the Colossians needed something more than Jesus if they wanted to grow as a Christian, if they wanted to be closer to God or be more spiritual.

But in verse eight, we're told that this teaching is actually hollow, deceptive. It couldn't deliver the growth it promised. It's like this empty plastic box on the floor here.

I mean, back in verse four, we're told though that this teaching sounded good. Verse four says, it was fine sounding argument. And so it sounded like it would help them grow as Christians, but it couldn't deliver.

It was deceptive. We have some Christian friends whom we're having dinner with one time and they started to tell us that they had received a second baptism of the spirit.

And if we had not received the second baptism of the spirit, if we didn't pray in a certain way, they talked about the language was being slain in the spirit. I'm not exactly sure what they meant, but that's what they said. And they said, if we didn't do this, then we were only half Christians.

[8 : 30] That's what they said. We're half Christians, not full ones. You see, some people had come to them and taught them and said, if you want to be more spiritual guys, then you need more of the spirit.

And that kind of sounds logical, doesn't it? Oh, be more spiritual. We need more of the spirit. Yeah, it makes sense. It was a fine sounding argument, but it was deceptive because it's not true.

The Bible doesn't speak about that. In fact, the spirit in the Bible points us to Jesus. And the Bible makes it clear that if we are Christians, we have the spirit and that's it.

We're full Christians. And although this teaching, like the false teaching to the Colossians, was never meant to replace Christ, it almost always does. Because people inevitably get so caught up with this special teaching, they get so carried away with it that they shift their focus from Christ to this new teaching.

And so our friends got so caught up about speaking about this, putting stuff on Facebook and the things like that, that Christ actually got squeezed out of the picture. Which is ironic since the spirit wants us to focus on Christ.

[9 : 40] Christ. But this can happen even with good things. Things that are in the Bible like communion we've just had today. I mean, I know one person who will only come to church when there is communion. Now, communion is meant to point us to Jesus and his death for us.

It's in the Bible. It's a good thing. But for this person, she thinks you must have communion to get closer to God. and that without it, you're not close to God.

So she only comes to church when there's communion. But you see, by thinking this way, you're saying that Christ is not enough to bring you close to God. You're saying you need something more, whether it's an extra blessing of the spirit or communion or whatever.

And the focus shifts from Jesus to those things. But Paul is saying, don't let that happen to you. You continue as a Christian the way you began in Christ.

Remember chapter, verse 6 and 7? Just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, so continue to walk in him. We keep depending on Jesus, trusting in him alone.

[10 : 47] For he not only makes us Christians, but he grows us as Christians. Why are we to trust in him alone? Well, Paul gives us two reasons. The first one's in verse 9. So depend on Christ, he says, verse 8, verse 9, for or because in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form and in Christ you have been brought to fullness.

He is the head over every power and authority, it says. Here we are reminded of who Jesus is. He is fully God. And we saw that in chapter 1. And so if we are in Christ, who is God, then we are in God himself.

You cannot get any closer to God than we already are in Christ. It's like saying, you know, Melbourne is fully Victorian, right? And so if we live in Melbourne, then we live in Victoria, don't we? You can't get any more Victorian than being in Melbourne. Well, Christ is fully God. And so if we live in Christ, then we live in God himself. We can't get any closer to God spiritually.

One day, we'll physically get closer to him, seeing him face to face, but spiritually, we are already as close as we can be. We are his precious children. He's our father. You see, if you live in Christ, then you cannot get any more loved by God than you already are.

[12 : 09] You cannot get any more security of heaven than we already have. You cannot be any more in God's family than we already are. You cannot be any more blessed spiritually than we already are.

So on the next slide, Paul says something similar in Ephesians chapter 1. He says, God has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. And so if we have every spiritual blessing, then how many do we lack?

None. We're full. In Christ, we've been brought to spiritual fullness, says Paul in Colossians. Oh, sure, we'd like a few more physical blessings, no doubt.

You know, I'd love half a million dollars. That would be nice. It doesn't seem to go far these days, does it? But those physical blessings only last a lifetime. The spiritual ones last an eternity. And we have every one of them.

In Christ, we've been brought to spiritual fullness. We have everything we need for life and godliness. We're spiritually full. And so we don't need any other teaching. And if that's not enough to encourage the readers to stick with Christ alone, then he gives another reason of what has happened to us in Christ.

[13 : 20] Have a look at verse 11. He talks about getting new life. It's a bit complicated, but the guts of it is that we're given new life in Christ. He says, In the same way, you also were circumcised with a circumcision, not performed by human hands.

In other words, it's something spiritual that happened to us. Your whole self, ruled by the flesh, was put off, circumcised, when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism,

in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us.

He took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Now, as I said, these verses are a bit hard to understand, especially because Paul uses a language of circumcision to talk about what has happened to us spiritually. And I take it he uses that language, possibly because the false teachers were saying to the Colossians things like, well, if you really want to be a full Christian, not a half one, then you need to be circumcised, that is the men, like the Old Testament Jews were.

[14:44] But Paul takes that language and uses it to say that, well, in Christ we already have been. Not physically, not by human hands, but spiritually. And his point is that Jesus' death for us means we've been set free from our old spiritual life that was dead to God.

It's been cut off, thrown away. Once we were dead to God in our sins, but now God has raised us up with Christ to new spiritual life so that we are alive to him.

we no longer have to face or fear judgment. Christ has paid for our sins. See verse 13? We were once dead in sin, but God has made us alive in Christ.

How? Well, verse 14, he forgave us and cancelled the charge which stood against us. You see, the authorities he mentions in verse 15 are spiritual authorities and they say Andrew Price cannot have new life in your kingdom God because he has sinned.

He must pay for his sins in judgment. And they're right. After all, that's justice. Justice demands that you do the time for the crime.

[16:00] But Christ paid for our sins at the cross. he took our judgment in our place. And so now the authorities don't have a leg to stand on.

They cannot demand our judgment anymore because Christ has already taken it. And so verse 15, they are disarmed. No leg to stand on. Can't accuse us anymore.

Our sin has been paid for. And so the debt we owe for our sin has been cancelled. We are forgiven and free to have new life in Christ. And Paul is reminding Colossians and us that in Christ we both have spiritual fullness and new life.

We have everything we need spiritually already. So we don't need any of these other teachings or traditions. If someone says to you that you need to do this as well as believe in Jesus, then don't believe them.

Don't let them judge you. Point three, verse 16. He says, Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day.

[17:08] These are a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ. And do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you.

Such a person goes into great detail about what they have seen. They are puffed up with idle notions and by their unspiritual mind. They have lost connection with Christ, the head, from whom the whole body, the church, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Paul says, don't let anyone judge you. In other words, don't give in to what they think. In fact, if you have the opportunity, then tell them that they don't need to do these other things either. Because in Christ, we have everything we need to be right with God and to grow in God, to grow as a Christian. Notice this false teaching, the Colossians were being taught, was a mixed bag from rules about what to eat and drink to Sabbath days to visions to worship of angels and so on. It was a real mixed bag.

Some of it was completely man-made, but some of it was from God in the Old Testament. But here's two things to notice. First, even those things that were from God in the Old Testament like Sabbath days and so on, they were always meant to point us to Jesus.

[18:27] They were never meant to last. They were like a shadow that pointed to the reality of Christ. So for example, the Sabbath day rest was meant to point us to the rest we have in Jesus.

And so, I could be a little bit controversial, but I don't think we have to obey the Sabbath law anymore. It's fulfilled in Christ. I mean, it's a good thing to do. But we don't have to get right with God.

The religious festivals in the Old Testament point us to the heavenly festival that we'll enjoy with Christ and so on. They were a shadow. Christ is reality. That's the first thing to realize.

And the second thing to realize is that these things are dangerous because as I said before, with our friends and the lady with communion, we can focus so much on the tradition and the ritual that it can lead us away from the person of Christ.

That's what the guy has done in verse 18 and 19. He goes on about his visions and so on and he's become puffed up so much so, verse 19, that he's lost connection with Christ, the head of the body. [19:32] And if we try to add extra things to Jesus, if we depend on these other things like visions and communion and so on, rather than on Christ, then we can actually replace Christ for these rituals and lose connection.

Like the tree at the start, we can be uprooted from Christ and find ourselves no longer growing nor going to heaven. I heard someone say, I had another illustration in mind but this one's much more quicker, so I heard someone say recently this thing on the next slide, this is what he's saying, Christ plus nothing actually equals everything.

But Christ plus something will end up equaling nothing because it takes us away from Jesus, you see. We need to depend on Christ and Christ alone.

If we add to Christ then we end up losing connection and missing out on heaven. And so Paul says in verse 18, don't let anyone disqualify you or literally cheat you out of heaven by insisting that you follow these other things instead of Jesus.

But remember verse 19 that God grows us through Jesus. He is the head of the body, the church. Jesus is the one who supports us as his people, who nourishes us and encourages us to keep growing.

[20:52] He's the one that God uses to grow us as Christians. And in case we've still not got the point to walk in Christ alone, then Paul adds three final reasons. I'm not going to have time to unpack them but just look at them with me just quickly in verses 20 to 23.

So the first reason he says, since you die with Christ to the elemental forces of the world, that is you're no longer living the world's way but God's way, why, as though you still belong to the world, do you submit to its rules like do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.

That's the first one. Second reason, these rules which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use are based on merely human commands and teachings.

So they don't last. And thirdly, such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom. You know, they sound like fine-sounding arguments. They've got self-imposed worship, their false humility and harsh treatment of the body might make someone look spiritual but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Our friends I mentioned who got sidetracked with this extra teaching about the spirit in their church one of the youth group leaders, an adult, had an inappropriate relationship with a teenage girl and when it was found out the church did nothing.

[22:13] They went on about this extra teaching that made you mature Christians and made you super spiritual and so on and yet it did nothing for their godliness. That's what Paul's saying there in verse 23.

And so we're to stick with Christ and Christ alone. What does all this mean for us then? Well, three things I think. First, the reason the Colossians were in danger of accepting this extra teaching on top of Christ was that they were actually eager to grow as a Christian.

And as I was thinking about this I thought, am I eager to grow as a Christian? You know, if someone walked in here and started doing some weird and wacky teaching, I think we'd spot it from a mile away, right?

But for the Colossians, they were so keen to grow in Christ that they were in danger of getting sidetracked. And so I wonder whether that's the first thing we need to ask ourselves. Are we keen to grow as a Christian?

As the Colossians seem to be. Second, if we are keen to grow then do we look to Christ alone? We ought to continue to walk in Him and Him alone.

[23:25] And as I said, I don't think we're in danger of adding religious rules to Christ like the worship of angels. I suspect our danger is more like adding worldly attitudes to Christ. You see, the

Colossians were not being told to get rid of Jesus altogether, but simply to add these things to Him as well.

And that seems to be the message of the world today, isn't it? We're never told to get rid of Jesus altogether because we preach tolerance, but we are told, don't be too fundamental about it. Don't take Jesus too seriously. You don't need to read your Bible that much. You don't need to accept the whole part of the Bible. You can take the bit about love but reject the bit about sexuality. It's the 21st century after all. And our culture teaches us that we're to be tolerant, which means something different now, do you realise? It used to mean that you could disagree with someone's view, but you'd still respect their right to have it.

Now, our culture says that we're to be tolerant by not even disagreeing with someone else's view. And our culture says you can be a Christian, sure, as long as you don't stand up for Christ, as long as you don't talk about him or disagree with others, as long as you think everyone's right.

[24 : 43] These are cultural teachings. And they don't work, if you think about them logically. And so as Christians, we may be tempted to add to Christ cultural teachings, but to walk in Christ means to walk in him alone, not adding any other teachings to him.

Having said that, we can still sometimes depend on our religious tradition rather than on Christ, so the lady with communion, for example, where the focus becomes the process of growing as a Christian rather than the person of Jesus.

You see, the process of growing as a Christian involves coming to church, reading the Bible, communion, praying to God and so on. But these things are meant to point us to the person of Christ, to help us walk in him, walk in his ways, walk in his footsteps.

Yet we can sometimes focus on the process and forget the person. For example, one night I asked our kids if one of them wanted to say grace before we ate dinner. Megan, our youngest, put up a hand, so we closed our eyes and then she said, grace, let's eat.

When I looked at her, she said, what? I said, grace. But you see, she was just going through the motion, wasn't she? Just focused on the process rather than the person of Jesus.

[25 : 53] Take reading the Bible, for example. A Bible study group was saying that if he gets something wrong, and I've done this myself, we can think, oh, I forgot to say my prayers and read my Bible.

I wonder if that's God punishing me. Or we can think, I've been reading my Bible and saying my prayers, so God should be good to me. He should do what I want. Or what I sometimes do is I race through the Bible reading so I can tick it off the to-do list, done, and then I can get on to more important stuff.

But as soon as we've done those sorts of things, we focus on the process rather than the person of Christ. It's as though we depend on the quiet time rather than Christ, whom the quiet time is to point us to.

Just like the Colossians, we're tempted to depend on human tradition rather than on Christ. So we actually need to learn the art of pausing, I think. Life is busy. We're constantly watching the clock. I am now, and I realize I'm running out of time. But we need to build in time to pause so that we can focus on the person of Jesus and not just completing the process of going to church, reading the Bible, just going through the motion.

[27 : 05] We need to work at pausing and reflecting on him and what he's done for us, that we might be encouraged to keep growing as a Christian. And if we do that, then it actually means we're free from feeling guilty.

if we miss out on reading the Bible here or there. Because it's not about ticking it off the list. It's about focusing on Christ. And in fact, if we focus on Christ rather than the process, it actually becomes a joy to come to church and read the Bible.

It's no longer, oh, do we have to go to church? Oh, do we really have to read the Bible? But if we focus on the person of Christ who died for us, then we'll want to come to church so that we can get to know him better.

We'll want to read the Bible so that we can get to know him more. Turns it from a burden to a joy. And finally, we are to remember what we have in Christ that we might overflow with thanks.

We're to remember that Christ has died for us, taken the punishment for us, paid our debt. And so in Christ we have been brought to spiritual fullness. In him you cannot be any more loved than you are right now.

[28 : 15] You cannot be spiritually closer to God than you are right now, whether you feel like it or not. You cannot have any greater guarantee of heaven than you have right now.

Because in Christ you have all of God's love. You have every spiritual blessing. You are in God's family. And you have the most secure guarantee ever.

In Christ you have everything you need spiritually for a life of contentment and joy now and a life of eternal paradise later. And if we have all that, then we're to overflow with thanks, are we not?

Yesterday, Dane Bird-Smith walked in his Australian uniform and overflowed with thankfulness for receiving a bronze medal which will last a lifetime. In fact, one comment on Facebook about Dane was this on the next slide.

It says on the next slide, he won bronze but his attitude and gratefulness for the medal is gold. Well, we are to walk not in Australian uniform but in Christ.

[29 : 24] And we are to overflow with thankfulness for receiving not a medal that lasts a lifetime but for receiving every spiritual blessing which lasts an eternity. And so just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, so continue to walk in him, rooted, built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank you for your word to us this morning. Although it's been a long passage, we help us to remember the important truth that it teaches us.

that in Christ we have everything we need for spiritual life and godliness. And so we are to stick with Christ and Christ alone. Help us, we pray, to walk in him, to follow in his footsteps and to grow us in his likeness.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.