

In Christ: So Walk In Him

Colossians 2:6-10

Christianity is established on this one great theological truth:
Christ in you, the hope of glory.

This is not a truth that you learn once and then move on to
other things.

Having received Jesus Christ by faith, we are now called to live
every day by faith in Him.

The glory that we hope for is a full experience of God such that
we know as we are fully known.

It is living in full submission to the One who is now our
Covenant Lord.

It is unending delight in His presence, together with all the
saints.

Being born again by the Spirit of God, we now have a heart that
hungers to know God and experience His fullness. Hungering
and thirsting after God is one sign of being saved.

Psalm 42:1-2 . As a deer pants for flowing streams, so
pants my soul for you, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God. When shall I come and appear before
God?

Psalm 63:1-3 O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek
you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a
dry and weary land where there is no water. ² So I have
looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power

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and glory. ³ Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.

The promise of life in Christ is a promise of spiritual refreshment and even delight.

Isaiah 55:1-2 "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

John 7:37-38 ³⁷ On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

It may then seem strange that I would caution you to be wary of overly craving the experience of God.

It is possible to crave an experience with God such that you are no longer truly craving God, but rather the experience itself.

And if you go down the road of pursuing experience, you may very well find yourself departing from Christ without realizing it.

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At the heart of the Colossian heresy was the desire to find a greater experience of God.

But what Paul values even more than our present experience of God is our firm faith in Jesus Christ.

In Colossians 2:5 Paul writes that he is, “rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.”

More than enjoying spiritual experiences, we are to walk by faith in Christ alone.

Read Colossians 2:6-10.

6 Therefore,
 as you received Christ Jesus the Lord,
 so walk in him,

How did you receive Jesus Christ?

Simply by faith. You believed that He died to pay the penalty for your sin and to put your sin to death, so that you could once again be in a right relationship with Him. And you placed your trust in Him to save you.

This is precisely the way that you must live your life: continuing to believe what the Gospel says about Christ, and His dwelling in you.

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Jesus taught us to walk by faith, not by sight.
Walking by sight includes our feelings.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

“the conviction of things not yet fully experienced.”

We want to experience the fullness of the reality of our relationship with God.

But while we are in this world, we must continue living by faith.

You must continue believing that Jesus is the One in whom all the treasures of knowledge are found.

You must continue believing that Jesus is the One in whom and through whom and to whom are all things.

You must continue believing that you are in Christ and He is in You, such that the victory that He is currently experiencing is also yours, even though you are not yet currently experiencing that victory in its fullness.

I am called to live out each day believing that I am “in Christ”.

Do I feel the fullness of being in Christ?

No!

Has God graciously given me glimpses of the sweetness of His presence?

Many more than I deserve.

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But the bulk of my life has been lived in the hope of glory, not the experience of glory.

And my future hope is not rooted in my current experience.

It is rooted in Christ: believing who He is as Creator and Sustainer of all things... believing that the Incarnation was not about a sweet baby in a manger, but the first step of Christ coming to take up residence in my soul... believing that the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross was sufficient to pay for all of my sin... and trusting that in His own ascension to the throne of heaven that He has now raised me with Him.

Have you received this Jesus Christ?

In the same way that you received Him, continue walking in Him.

Christ established himself as the root system of your daily life.

Apart from Him you can do nothing.

You are...

7 rooted
 and
 built up
 in him
 and
 established
 in the faith,

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just as you were taught,
abounding in thanksgiving.

What does it mean to be rooted in Christ?

It means that all of God's promised blessing flows to you from Christ alone.

There is no other source of blessing.

Every hope of the Christian comes from one fountain.

"Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing"

We are not only "rooted" in Christ, we are also "built up" in Christ.

We are like a building being constructed, one brick at a time.

But each and every brick is made by Christ alone. There are no other bricks to be had.

Paul wants the Colossians to understand that there is no growth, no ongoing construction, apart from being "in Him."

The faith in which we are established and in which we need continual strengthening is that all our hopes are found in Christ alone.

Your obedience is NOT the fountain of blessing.

Your obedience is one fruit of blessing.

God's blessing is NOT earned by your obedience.

Only Christ's obedience was sufficient to earn God's blessing.

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We receive God's blessing by faith alone in Christ alone.

This is just as true on the last day of our lives in this world as it was on the first day we believed.

When the Colossians first believed, their faith resulted in thanksgiving.

If you believe that all your hopes are found in Christ, and you believe that through faith alone you are united to Christ, then how could you not be thankful?

But while thanksgiving happens almost reflexively when you first trust in Christ, it must be regularly cultivated as you repeatedly choose to live each day by the same faith in Christ.

It is hard to be thankful when you do not feel closeness with God.

It is hard to be thankful when you continue to struggle with stubborn sin.

And rather than continuing to live each day trusting in Christ alone, you begin to search for something else to give you intimacy and victory.

It is hard to continue waiting upon God through continued faith in Christ.

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If Christ has not yet delivered what I want, why should I continue trusting in Him?

Because Christ is the only root by which we receive God's life. God's life is given to us freely as He freely imparts to us His Holy Spirit.

And the only reason God gave you His Spirit is because you believed.

Galatians 3:2-3 ² Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Your union with Jesus Christ, by the indwelling Holy Spirit, is not primarily a feeling.

It is a spiritual reality that you must choose to walk in every day.

If your union with Christ was primarily a sensual experience, you would not need to walk by faith.

You could walk by the sensual experience of God.

I am not saying that our union with Christ does not produce some physical and emotional well-being.

I am simply saying that it is not primarily a sensual experience.

Because of this, we can often think of our faith in Christ as being empty. Nothing could be further from the truth.

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Empty are the countless other means by which people seek greater spiritual ecstasy and victory.

8 See to it
that no one takes you captive
by philosophy
and
empty deceit,
according to human tradition,
according to the elemental spirits of the
world,
and
not according to Christ.

Paul warns the Colossians to be on guard against being taken captive.

This implies that there are people who would like to take you captive.

These may be people in the Church.

They might be people outside the Church.

Behind these people stand the spiritual forces of evil who are the true enemy.

And we must not forget that in many ways our old nature wants to be deceived.

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To be taken captive is to come under the spell of that which is false.

It is to believe lies.

Paul labels these lies as philosophy and empty deceit.

He is not against all philosophy. He is against the “hollow and deceptive philosophy” that leads people away from a firm faith in Christ.

Those ideas that promise you a fuller spiritual experience or greater victory over sin than can be had through faith in Christ alone are empty. They are lying to you.

In our day, many people have rejected traditional orthodox Christianity along with the regular, yet ordinary, worship in weekly church services, for any number of other “things” to give them the higher experience for which they yearn.

The truth is found in Christ alone. And Christ is made known to us through the regular means of grace: the Word, Sacraments and Prayer.

In Colossae, the false ideas were coming from two sources: human tradition and the elemental spirits of the world.

Let's look at each of these.

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What does Paul mean by “Human Tradition”?

Tradition is that which is passed down from one generation to another.

Not all tradition is bad. We have a tradition of celebrating the Reformation on Oct. 31st each year. It is a human tradition, but it is a good tradition.

Paul can also speak of the Gospel message in terms of tradition.

ESV **1 Corinthians 11:2** Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.

ESV **2 Thessalonians 2:15** So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

The NT is the summation of those traditions handed down to us by the Apostles.

But when Paul speaks negatively of tradition, he is speaking about those that are contrary to the Gospel and the truth of God’s Word.

Jesus condemned the Pharisees for promoting this sort of tradition.

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ESV **Mark 7:8** You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."

So, human traditions, in this negative sense, are any traditions that would take the place of Christ.

Anything that is "not according to Christ."

We do not know the specific traditions that were taking the Colossians captive. But it is likely that they were practices from the "shell" of the Jewish faith. Before Christ came, the Jewish religion was useful to point us to the coming Messiah. But now that Jesus has come, the foreshadows are no longer necessary. The substance is found in Christ. The temptation of the Colossians seems to be the lie that greater spiritual experience would come from going back to the old traditions of the Jewish faith. If they kept various holy days and only ate ceremonially clean foods, then they would prepare themselves for this greater spiritual experience.

But these traditions were "not according to Christ."

Once you say, "If I do some "human activity", I will have a deeper experience of God" you are in danger of establishing another source of blessing other than Christ.

The Reformers loved to speak of "means of grace".

But the means of grace are not the "source of grace."

Grace is not ours because we pray.

Prayer is a means by which we trust in Christ.

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Grace is not ours because we study our Bibles or listen to preaching.

Those are the conduits through which God imparts Christ. The source of grace is always faith alone in Christ alone.

Our lives must be lived “according to Christ”.

1. According to the teaching of Christ.
2. According to the reconciliation found only in Christ.
3. According to the reality of Christ ruling over His New Creation and our belonging to Him and His rule.

When Christ rose up from the grave, He became the Firstborn over the New Creation.

In His flesh, Jesus rose up from the grave. The flesh that went into the grave is the flesh that came up out of the grave, but it was now a transformed flesh.

What was sown mortal, was raised immortal.

It is in this transformed human flesh that Jesus begins a new reign.

He reigned previously over the first creation.

But now he reigns over the new creation.

Only this new creation has not yet come in fullness.

When we repent of our sin and place all our hopes for redemption in Jesus Christ, we are born into the New Creation.

If any man is in Christ, he is part of the New Creation.

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Believers live between two worlds.

We are members of the new creation now, but we live in bodies still joined to the old creation.

Our bodies are still mortal, but they really belong to the immortal realm of Christ.

The truth of this reality is accepted by faith – not by sensory perception.

The perfect experience of God awaits the day when we die, or Jesus returns.

So, when an idea comes along that proclaims a perfect experience of God now, in this first creation world, it is empty. It cannot deliver. The best that this fleshly body can do is give you a less than perfect experience of God. It will always leave you craving for more because it cannot deliver what it promises.

As you get a glimpse of Christ as Lord of the New Creation, you begin to understand how Paul uses the phrase “Elemental Spirits of the World”.

ta. stoicei/a tou/ ko,smou

Literally: the elementary “things” of the world.

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The ESV, along with many other translations, adds the idea of “spirits”.

But the Greek word is broader, more general in meaning. “Elementary things” is right although we still need help in understanding all that this might include.

In ancient Greek literature, the word is used to describe the basic elements of the physical universe: earth, water, air, and fire.

Peter uses stoicheia in this sense.

CSB 2 Peter 3:10 But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that *day* the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed.

These four primary elements were so important philosophically and practically that from the beginning the Greeks personified them. They became spirits, or divinities, or demigods: the elemental spirits.

From the 1st C. BC Jewish book “Wisdom”

“... they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world.” (Wisdom 13:2)

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This explains why many translators want to add “spirits”.

It is this philosophy of the material Universe that Paul calls empty.

But while Paul does have the powers of the spiritual world in mind, that is not all that he has in mind.

Turn to Galatians 4 to see Paul’s use of the same Greek word.

Galatians 4:1-5 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, ² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

ESV **Galatians 4:9** But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

Galatians 4:10 ¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years!

It is clear from Galatians 4 that Paul can use the same Greek phrase to include the OT ceremonial laws. In this sense Paul

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connects the “traditions of men” with “elemental things”. (This is why some translations use “Principles”.)

Turn back to Colossians. Just a few verses down in Colossians 2:20, Paul uses the same Greek word again.

ESV **Colossians 2:20** If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations-

Here Paul does not seem to be referring to angelic beings, but human “regulations.”

The bottom line is that “elementals” can really refer to all three: physical elements and forces of this world, spiritual forces of darkness, and human regulations.

Really, anything that is a part of the original creation, because Christ rules over the New Creation, of which you are members through faith in Christ.

Elementary is a good word, because in Christ we have moved beyond them.

The things of this world cannot give you a sure hope of glory. If they could, Jesus would not have had to die.

Only New Creation Power is powerful enough to give you the life that you need.

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And New Creation Power is only found in Christ.

Everything else is of this present creation – elemental things – things that are empty and cannot deliver.

Paul makes this clear in vv. 9-10.

9 For in him
the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,
10 and
you have been filled
in him,
who is the head of all rule and authority.

Paul continues to fixate on the truth of what it means to live “in Him”.

In Him, “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” That means that the human Jesus was, and is, and will forever be fully divine.

But without the next statement, Jesus’ being fully divine would do us no good.

Paul writes, “you have been filled in him”.

This statement is important to get right.

^{YLT} **Colossians 2:10** and ye are in him made full,

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KJV Colossians 2:10 And ye are complete in him,

NIV Colossians 2:10 and you have been given fullness in Christ,

The verb is in the perfect passive tense. That means that it is a completed action that has ongoing effects.

Paul does not say, “you are in the process of being filled”. He writes, “you have already been filled.”

Again, Paul cannot be saying “in your experience you have been filled”. If this were true, he would not have had to teach it to them.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 ²¹ And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

As believers, we have been given the Holy Spirit, all of Him. But even though we have all the Spirit, we do not yet experience the fullness of God.

So because we have the Spirit, we have already been filled with God, but we still must wait to experience the fullness of God. So, we live every day by faith.

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In the same way that you received Jesus Christ, so walk in Him.

Paul finishes verse 10 by stating again that Jesus reigns over every “rule and authority.”

He is their Head. This means that they find their existence in Him as their source. But it also means that they are under his authority and control.

Paul can use “rule and authority” to refer to earthly kingdoms and human rulers, but more often than not, he is referring to the spiritual forces over this present world.

As Christians, we wage war against the spiritual forces of darkness. Ephesians 6 tells us clearly that we must fight against them every day. But we are not fighting against an enemy that is more powerful than our Master and King.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, he ascended to the throne at the right hand of God Almighty. From this position, he reigns over all, including the spiritual forces of evil. They are not somehow disconnected from His control.

The spiritual rulers and authorities of this world are formidable foes. They are much more powerful than us. But we do not fight them alone. We fight them “in Christ.” And they exist under Him.

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Every aspect of our Christian life is only made possible because we are “in Him.”

If we have Christ, we have everything.

Application:

1. Live each day renewing your faith in Christ.
 - a. Forgiveness
 - b. Strength
 - c. Thanksgiving
2. Guard against the deception that there must be more from some other source.
3. Fight against evil, knowing that you fight “in Him.”
 - a. You live under His rule.
 - b. You belong to His kingdom.
 - c. His power alone is sufficient to defeat your enemies.
4. Salvation is a gift, from the beginning to the end.
 - a. We do not bargain with God.

As you have received Jesus Christ, in the same way walk in Him.