

Centrality of the Son: A Study of Colossians

The Pull of the Son

Colossians 2:6-15

Keeping Christ Central

2:6-7

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.

Colossians 2:6-7

"Walk" (KJV, NASB) or "live" (NIV) was a regular term for behaving according to God's laws (see comment on Gal 5:16), and "receive" was often used for Jewish teachers of the law passing traditions on to their students. Paul thus exhorts the Colossians to continue in what (and whom) they were taught, not according to mere human traditions (2:8).

The IVP Bible Background Commentary

The three participles *rooted*, *built up*, and *firm* belong together and reflect three different metaphors. The first participle "*rooted*" (perfect tense) indicates a settled condition on the part of the Colossian believers and refers to horticulture. The second participle "*built up*" (present passive) comes from the world of architecture. The third participle "*firm* [established]" (present passive) comes from the law courts. With these three metaphors (as well as the following comment on thankfulness) Paul explains what he means when he commands them to continue to live their lives in Christ. The use of the passive probably reflects God's activity among them. It was he who had rooted them, had been building them up, and had established them in the faith (cf. 1 Cor 3:5-15 for the use of mixed metaphors).

The NET Bible

"As" (*kathōs*) draws attention to the relationship between receiving and continuing. Although Paul did not state precisely the point of comparison, the context surely called them to a focused faith in the all-sufficiency of Jesus in salvation. They were to remember the nature and content of their faith at the time of their salvation, and that was to guide them throughout their Christian lives as well.

Philippians, Colossians, Philemon

Challenge to Christ

2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

Colossians 2:8

Paul was concerned that no false teacher take the Colossian believers **captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy** (cf. v. 4). He wrote here not against all philosophy but against *false* philosophy, as the Bible also speaks against false religion (James 1:26). The particular false philosophy at Colosse was "hollow" (*kenēs*, "empty"), "deceptive," and based **on human tradition ... rather than on Christ**. True Christian philosophy "take[s] captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Philosophy is the love of wisdom, but if one loves wisdom that is not Christ (the Sum of all wisdom, Col. 2:3), he loves an empty idol. Such a one will be "always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7). This

kind of philosophy is based on the world's **basic principles** (*stoicheia*, "elementary principles" or "elemental spirits" [RSV]; cf. Col. 2:20; Gal. 4:3, 9). This may refer to the evil spirits who inspire such heresy and over whom Christ triumphed (cf. 2 Cor. 4:3-4; Eph. 6:11-12). Such a philosophy is demonic and worldly, not godly or Christlike. Unless believers are careful, such philosophy may ensnare them, taking them "captive."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Even though only the most educated went on to study rhetoric or philosophy, the influence of these disciplines permeated the ancient world. Because philosophy in this period grappled especially with moral and ethical issues, new Christians in the culture now struggling with the same questions would naturally be interested in philosophers' ideas. Diaspora Jewish writers praised "philosophy," and some, like Philo, combined it readily with ecstatic experiences (cf. 2:18). (Josephus, a Palestinian Jew writing for a non-Palestinian Gentile audience, even calls Judaism a "philosophy"—*Apion* 2.4, 47—and describes the different Jewish movements as philosophical sects. The Letter of Aristeeas, Philo, and even Justin's Trypho approved of and were skilled in Greek philosophy, and many Jewish apologists, including Philo and Josephus, accused the Greek philosophers of plagiarizing Moses.)

The IVP Bible Background Commentary

The most serious error of the false teachers at Colossae was that they went about their spiritual lives with only natural insight. They did not go to God to learn of him, nor did they learn from the revelation of Christ that was available to them.

Philippians, Colossians, Philemon

Provision in Christ

2:9-12

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Colossians 2:9-12

In him all the fullness of deity lives. The present tense in this verse ("lives") is significant. Again, as was stated in the note on 1:19, this is not a temporary dwelling, but a permanent one. Paul's point is polemical against the idea that the fullness of God dwells anywhere else, as the Gnostics believed, except in Christ alone. At the incarnation, the second person of the Trinity assumed humanity, and is forever the God-man.

The NET Bible

They were completely saved (2:11-14). These four verses contain two subjects relevant to the Jewish audience Paul addressed: the covenant, which was symbolized by circumcision, and the law. These two reference points stand for all the requirements of the law. There is a logical relationship between the two. One recalls the entrance to the legal system; the other recalls the continued life it expects. These aspects form the basis for Paul's discussion of the Christian life. There is an entrance (baptism into Christ) and a continuing (life by faith). Using Old Testament imagery, Paul explained that God took care of the old life at conversion (2:11-12) and that he provided for the new life at the same time (2:13-14). These two aspects of Christian living are compared respectively to circumcision (2:11-12) and the law (2:13-14).

Philippians, Colossians, Philemon

Power in Christ

2:13-15

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

Colossians 2:13-15

Before a person is liberated to this new life in Christ, he is **dead in his sins and in his sinful nature** (cf. comments on the "earthly nature" in 3:5 and the "old self" in 3:9). Death means separation, not annihilation. Even the unsaved still bear the image of God (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9), but they are separated from God. Cut off from spiritual life, they still have human life. But now **God made you alive with Christ** (cf. Eph. 2:1-6). The same "power" (*energeias*; cf. "energy" in Col. 1:29) that raised Christ from the dead (2:12) resurrects believing sinners to spiritual life (v. 13).

The Bible Knowledge Commentary

This written code, the Law, was like a handwritten "certificate of debt" (NASB). Since people cannot keep the Law, it is like a bill of indebtedness. So people, unable to pay the debt, are criminals. But Jesus **took ... away** this criminal charge, this certificate of indebtedness, by His death. It is as if He were **nailing it to the cross** with Him, showing He paid the debt. He wiped the slate clean. As Krishna Rai put it: "Jesus for thee a body takes, thy guilt assumes, thy fetter breaks, discharging all thy dreadful debt; and canst thou then such love forget?"

The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Christ provides all we need
to live a life pleasing to God.

Q1. Why are Christians so attracted to "false" means of growing in their faith?

Q2. What are the dangers for us if we take our focus off Christ?