

⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces^[a] of this world rather than on Christ.

⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹ In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh^[b] was put off when you were circumcised by^[c] Christ, ¹² 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.

¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you^[d] alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.^[e]

¹⁶ 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 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. ¹⁸ Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. ¹⁹ They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

From Gardner to Guardian

I love to garden. It's no secret, in the afternoon, after the weather has cooled down I like to walk around the orchard and look at all the plants. See how they're doing, if anything is ripe, and whether there is something that still needs to be watered. It's fun to garden. I like to garden but it's not so fun to guard the garden, pull weeds, relocate gophers, and kill Bermuda grass. I just want to grow things without having to worry about what disease or damage may have been done because of a little bug or fungus, but it happens.

Paul would much rather work as a gardener rather than guardian in the church. For years Paul has traveled all over the Mediterranean planting the seed of God's Word and watching it grow but now that he is under house arrest in Rome suddenly he finds himself in a different position. He didn't plant the church in Colossae but he is writing a letter to Colossae to protect them, to guard them from the false teachings that could hurt, harm, or destroy their faith. And Paul points them to the gardener and instructs them to grow deeper in him.

Jesus uses the same word in the parable of the sower and the seed: rooted in. A shallow surface knowledge of Jesus can save but it's not safe especially in the face of the cares of this world, the problems we face, such faith could wither and die and that's the last thing Paul wants for the Colossians. So he points them to Christ, the God who provides from Gardener to Guardian all that we need for this body and life.

We don't know exactly what the Colossians faced but it was a substantial challenge to their faith. Rather than focus on the false teachings and the specifics of them he pulls out the truth. He points them back to Jesus. It's the same way people are trained to catch counterfeit currency. They don't show you a bunch of monopoly money and say, "See it's fake." They have you look at the real thing, hold it, feel it, get used to it so that if anything other than this comes your way you'll know something is off. Paul says this is the truth, *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.*

And it's so easy for us to skip over those words. Paul is already making grand claims concerning Jesus. This is a confession concerning who Jesus is and what he came to accomplish. First he points out that Jesus is the Christ. The anointed one of God who has come to Jesus (his name is Jesus for he will save his people from their sins) (Matthew 1:21). And most importantly, *"Jesus is the Lord."* That's not just a Lord but Paul uses the definite article in front of Christ and Lord to identify him not as one among many but as the specific Christ, and the one specific Lord over all. While there may be many Christ's, this is the Christ. While there may be many Lord's, this is the Lord. This is the one that Paul proclaims from beginning to end of this short letter Jesus is the Christ, the Lord. And then there is the famous Colossians 2:9 statement that says, "Jesus is everything that God is." *"All the fullness of the deity dwells in bodily form."*

What should they do? We arrive at the first command, "Walk in him." Well if you're looking ahead you might wonder how? If God is the gardener and we are to remain rooted, how are we to walk in him? This is not the Ents in Lord of the Rings,

(large walking oak trees) but this is more like the old oaks that continuously reach deeper into the soil for nutrients and water. Paul isn't mixing metaphors he wants them to walk in him. That's one of Paul's favorite phrases especially in this section. We are to walk in him, not through him or away from him but in him. *Continue to walk in him, ⁷ by being rooted and built up in him, and strengthened in the faith just as you were taught, while you overflow in faith^[b] with thanksgiving.*

We don't know what the Colossians faced but we too face many different problems. Every false teaching is an attack on the person and work of Christ. Every false teaching chips away at the sure and certain hope we have and points us to look to another place be it our personal performance or what you avoid. The evil three of... is not, "dancing, drinking, and smoking." The evil trio as described by scripture are the devil, the world, and my own sinful nature. Our sinful nature is constantly looking to self for salvation, be it in feelings or in works or in minimizing what it means to be a Christians. Paul doesn't say, "Just say Jesus." He says walk in him. Grow and gain a deeper knowledge and love for what he has done for you.

Rather than focus on Jesus and his work for us we often want to move beyond that minimize our differences with, "We all basically believe the same thing anyway." Every false teaching is opposed to Christ and the good news of his saving work. Every false teaching chips away at the certainty of our salvation by injecting human efforts into the salvation equation. That's man-made religious tradition. If we accept such false teaching it can shipwreck our faith and lose God's grace. We can fall into the same trap as the Colossians. We too have neglected growing deeper in Jesus. Rather than garden and guard those God has given to us – may even let them wander off.

Paul wants us rooted in Christ. *All the fullness of the deity dwells in bodily form.* He wants us to *watch out* not just, "See to it." The rare construction suggests that danger is serious and near at hand (Gerlach, pg 2). Paul doesn't want them taken captive to the philosophies and worldviews of their time. He doesn't want us to fall into human traditions that offer no hope. Paul isn't saying philosophy is bad, it's the study and love of wisdom. God's Word is rightly called a philosophy. Tradition isn't bad. Some traditions are very good. Tradition is known as the democracy of the dead. It's what those Christians who have gone before us elected of great importance. The greatest traditions of the Christian church are the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds. These creeds detail the essentials of the Christian faith. Either you fall under them and

in Christ or outside of the faith, outside of Christianity. The one thing that makes traditions unworthy to follow is the modifier, “human,” those things that are based on culture or humanity. Many times these human traditions – point away from Christ and his work for us. God is the gardener. He is also the guardian.

God grows his garden and while Paul commands the Colossians to walk in him, watch out, and don't let anyone judge you there is plenty that God is busy doing. The rest, “*being rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith just as you were taught*” aren't things that you can do. They are written in the passive. That means you are the object being acted upon. God is the active agent. God roots you. God builds you up. God strengthens you. These are all things that God does for you. And that is a tremendous comfort. How? God works through word and sacrament driving our roots deeper and deeper in him. Here we are rooted. Here we are rooted in Christ. God did this when we were dead in sin.

When we were dead in sin God made us alive in Christ by forgiving us all our trespasses. ¹⁴ God erased the record of our debt brought against us by his legal demands. This record stood against us, but he took it away by nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ After disarming the rulers and authorities, he made a public display of them by triumphing over them in Christ. We move from rooted, built up, and strengthened to a war won. It was a war and you were fighting against him. When Adam and Eve sinned they made a new friend with the devil. But God promised right then and there in the garden, “*I will make enmity between you and the woman, between her offspring and yours.*” Right then and there God said to the serpent, “It won't always be like this.” I'm going to make them your enemies. The Bible also describes our situation as slaves to sin, dead in sin. Unable to help ourselves. But God helped us. He came down. Took the law with its legal demands that stood against us, what our sins deserve and he nailed them to the cross. They weren't just erased the word is forceful, they were obliterated.

What looked like the greatest failure of all time, when the devil thought he had won, was the greatest defeat ever. When a war was won the enemy was paraded through town. They were brought before the people and stripped of their weapons, armor, and clothes. The spoils of war were paraded into town declaring to one and all, “It's finished. We've won.” Jesus has bought us back. We were captives of war, fighting against him, when he brought us back and rather than humiliate us before the heavenly host he makes us family.

We were brought into this family through baptism where he places his name on us. It isn't a sign of our commitment to God, Talk about a terrible sign. It's water. You can't see it nor can anyone else. For those who think it's a sign of commitment, maybe add some dye or permanent marker to the water. This is God's pledge to us. This is his promise that we are forgiven. It is based on this fact, outside of us, that we are saved.

It's not done by us. Paul makes that abundantly clear as he compares circumcision to baptism. *You were also circumcised in him, with a circumcision not done by human hands, in the putting off of the body of flesh,^[c] in the circumcision of Christ,¹² when you were buried with Christ in baptism. And in baptism you were also raised with him through the faith worked by the God who raised Christ from the dead.* Not by human hands – but this was done in baptism when you were buried with Christ. And in baptism we are also raised with Christ. Peter says it, “*Baptism now saves you.*” Not because of the work that you've done but because of God at work in the words and promises in scripture. It's not the water that does such great things but the words and promises associated with it. God wants you absolutely certain. He doesn't want you to think, “This all depends on me,” for even a second. He gives us no reason to boast not even in our own acceptance of him. He wants you rooted, built up, and strengthened. He tells us it's done. This is completely opposite from the basic principles of this world which tell us to deal with our sins ourselves.

Finally, *“You have been given fullness in him, who is the head of every power and authority.* You already have everything in Christ, in him. God has given it to you. There is no spiritual blessing that is lacking when we are in him. Those blessings are lost when we are outside of Christ, when we reject him. But in Christ we have every blessing he has won for us. Be in the Word. Remain in him. Spend your time with the church. The body of Christ. So that you are able to withstand the false philosophies, human traditions, and empty promises all around. Don't let the judgments of other people bother you. Eat, drink, rejoice. There is no festival, new moon, or Sabbath day that needs to be observed, we've been set from the legal demands of the law, and they are fulfilled in Christ.

So even if you don't like gardening or you're bad at it, it doesn't matter because it's out of your hands and in Christ's. Who baptized you, rooted, and built you up in him. That is the one in whom we walk. Amen.

