

Sermon Series:

New Life in Christ

A study of the book of Colossians



WALK IN HIM

(Colossians 2:6,7; Jeremiah 17:5-8; Luke 6:46-49) Becky Douglass

I'm a very visual learner and communicator. Colourful charts and diagrams help me to learn and teach. If my study gets too messy, I can't work because the mess I can see makes my thinking messy. I love colour and texture. I'd rather show a picture than try to explain with words. For me, a picture really is worth a thousand words.

This week, I'm very happy because in these two verses – just one sentence – Paul uses five metaphors or pictures to get across the central thought in his letter to the Colossians. These two verses sum up all that Paul wants to tell the Colossians and he does it by using pictures – He's speaking my language!

The command

To get our bearings with today's verses, it is helpful to go back to see where we ended last time where Paul was saying: "*I rejoice that you are living as you should and that your faith in Christ is strong.*" He is very proud of them and how they have put their faith in Christ. They are not doing anything wrong. However, Paul doesn't want them to stop there! He challenges them, in fact he commands them, to take the next step. "*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him ...*". They have received or accepted Jesus as their Christ or Saviour and accepted His lordship of their lives. Now they are to "*walk in him*" – to take their relationship with Him everywhere they go. This is the central phrase of this passage. In fact, it is the key statement of the whole book of Colossians. Everything that comes before is about who Christ is and what role He should play in their lives. Everything after this statement explains how they are to walk in him.



Walk in Him

With this phrase comes the first picture of this sentence. Many translations choose to interpret the Greek word '*walk*' as 'live your life in him' or 'follow him'. These are all good ways to interpret the word. But I think they lose some of the richness of the picture Paul has given us. For instance, we walk differently in different stages of our lives, don't we? A baby is doing great as she takes her first steps with help from her parents. But we wouldn't want a young adult to still be taking baby steps! We expect a healthy adult to be able

to walk confidently and even run. And we don't think less of an elderly person, or a person with a physical handicap if they need a walker. Each walk is different, but each is appropriate

to that person's situation. The same is true with our lives in Christ. A new Christian isn't expected to live for Christ with the same confidence as someone who has been a Christian for a long time. Different wauls are appropriate for different stages of our relationship with God. In the same way, we walk differently over different terrain. Sometimes the "terrain" of our life is smooth and we can walk easily. At other times, it is a hard uphill climb, and we must go much slower and more carefully. And sometimes it seems like we are going where no one has gone before and we can only take one step at a time in faith that God is leading us.

Walking is something which is constantly changing and adapting to each circumstance in which we find ourselves and so is our walk with Christ. As we walk with Him, we learn new skills and discover new things. Each person's walk with God is unique to them and God leads each of us through different circumstances and in different ways. Sometime the walk is relatively easy and if we are not careful, we can forget to walk in Christ because we think we can do it on our own. When the walk is difficult, we can be tempted to give up but that is when Christ wants to work through us and enable us to do what we never thought we could. But in every situation, our responsibility is to "*walk in him*", trusting Him to guide us and enable us for each step. We are not on our own. We can go forward in faith, knowing He is with us every step of the way, providing us with all we need.

The Provision

Paul goes on to share three ways in which Christ has provided for our walk. These three things which Christ has done and is doing for us. They are not commands for us to obey but realities on which we can depend. Our job is to cooperate with what Christ is doing. Paul says we have been "*rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught ...*" The first two things have to do with our relationship with Christ and the final one comes as a support to the first two.



When we receive the life of Christ and are born again into a new relationship with Him, Paul says that we are transplanted into Him – our roots are placed into the rich soil that is Christ. There we will have all the nutrients we need to grow. The Bible uses many agricultural pictures to teach about our lives as God's people. In Ephesians, a book that has many similar themes to Colossians, Paul prays the following:

... that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge ... (Eph 3:17-19)

As our roots grow deep into Christ's love, we are strengthened with the nutrients we need. Christ provides the environment for growth, our responsibility is to "*Let your roots grow down into him*" as the New Living Translation puts this. And the deeper the roots, the bigger the tree will grow. A pot-bound plant will never grow big, but in Christ, there is nothing to limit our growth. Our responsibility is simply to trust Christ and soak up all that He wants to give us.

The passage that we read in Jeremiah paints a vivid picture of the difference between those who put their trust in humans and those who put their trust in God.

⁵ *This is what the LORD says:*

*“Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans,
who rely on human strength and turn their hearts away from the LORD.*

⁶ *They are like stunted shrubs in the desert, with no hope for the future.
They will live in the barren wilderness, in an uninhabited salty land.*

⁷ *“But blessed are those who trust in the LORD
and have made the LORD their hope and confidence.*

⁸ *They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water.
Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought.
Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.*

What a contrast there is between stunted shrubs in the desert and lush green trees by the river, full of fruit. There may be times of drought for both, but one will survive and the other will wither away. God has planted us “In Him” and “in Him” we will find all we need.



Next Paul moves to a building metaphor – another common one in the Bible. Again, this is something God does – He builds us up in Christ. Our lives, our walk is built on the firm foundation of Christ. But we need to cooperate with his building plan!

God often takes us into situations where we need to develop new aspects of our character. Maybe we walk into a situation where we have to interact with someone who is not very easy to like or work with. Our immediate response is often “God take me out of this situation!”. And sometimes God does show us His power by doing just that. But many times He asks us to trust Him to develop within us the ability to deal with the person – to even love them - through the power of Christ in us. Are we willing for Him to build that character brick into our lives? I’m not talking about enduring abuse that needs to be addressed, but I am talking about the everyday difficulties of getting along with other sinners like ourselves.

In another person’s life, God may walk them into a situation of physical difficulty - maybe a prolonged illness or disability. Again, our first reaction is often, “God take me out of this situation!”. And sometimes He does choose to heal us. But sometimes, He chooses instead to build good things into our lives through the difficulty. Joni Erikson Tada would be the first to tell you that she does not regret the accident which left her paralysed because God has used that situation to build into her life a richness in her that wouldn’t be there otherwise. I am not saying this is easy! But it is one way God builds our lives on the firm foundation of Christ.

How do we need to respond to God’s building activity in our lives? We need to respond in obedience and trust. We need to choose to allow Him to build our lives in His way and on the foundation of Christ alone. The Luke passage also uses a building metaphor, although slightly different, but the emphasis is the same. If we want a firm foundation, we need to allow God to dig down deep in our lives, basing our life on the solid rock of Christ. Then he

will be able to build us up strong in Him and we obey Him at each step of the way. When the storms come, we won't be washed away.

Established in 'The Faith'



Then Paul moves on to yet another picture, although one related to the first two. The first two pictures talk about our connection with Christ. We are rooted in Him and we are built in Him. These picture a close, personal relationship of trust and love. The next picture moves from talking about being “*in Him*” to being “*established in the faith, just as you were taught*”.

You'll notice that I've put quotations marks around 'The Faith'. When Paul talks about “the faith” here, he is not talking about our personal faith in Christ. Instead, he is talking about a body of truth about Christ and His saving work for us which they had been taught. It is talking about doctrine or 'The Faith'. For them, it was the truth which they had heard from Epaphras and now from Paul. For us today, it is in essence, the truth which God has given us in the Bible.

And what does this truth do for us in our walk in Him? It establishes us or strengthens us so that we cannot be moved away from Christ. As I thought about this, a picture came into my mind of buttresses.

You've seen these on cathedrals, I am sure. Cathedrals are big buildings with heavy towers and spires on top. The weight of these can cause the walls of the building to bow outwards and eventually collapse. You can build extra columns inside the building to help carry this weight but that ruins the big open spaces. It was discovered that if you build supports outside the building from the walls down to the ground you can support the weight from the outside and keep the walls from bowing outward. The buttresses establish or strengthen the building so that the pressure of the weight of the towers and spires won't cause the building to collapse. In the same way, the truth God has given us in the Bible supports us and strengthens the work God is doing in our lives so that the pressures of life don't cause us to collapse.

But there is another kind of buttress that I discovered. Trees can also develop buttresses. Some species which grow in shallow, wet soil cannot support themselves with just the roots underground. They grow what are called buttresses – roots above ground which stabilise the tree and support its growth. Otherwise, they wouldn't survive long as they would easily blow over in the wind. In the same way, the truth God has given us in the Bible supports us when we need extra help to stand strong against the storms of life.

God has given us the Bible so that we can know Him better and be strengthened in our walk with Him. And what do we need to do? We need to constantly expose ourselves to God's truth and allowing it to strengthen our relationship with God in Christ. God's Word points us to the truth about life. It reminds us of His love and care for us. It shows us the right way to walk. Most of all, it reveals God to us so that we can know Him better and walk more closely with Him.

The Response

Overflowing with Thanksgiving



And what is our response to all of this? We will be “*abounding (or overflowing) with thanksgiving*”. This is not a command like “*walk in Him*” is. This is a statement of the natural outcome of all that has come before. As we walk in Christ and with Christ, as we allow our roots to go down deep into Him and absorb the richness of His love, as we allow Him to build us up into all that He intends for us, as we are strengthened as we read His Word, we will be filled with joy and thankfulness to God.

We will be living life as God intended and there is nothing better on this earth than that.

This is not a surface happiness or a determination to find the positive in everything. This does not mean there won't be tears of sorrow and pain. But flowing beneath everything and bubbling up and overflowing will be the joy of a life lived in relationship with God as He intended us to live. Paul's last picture is of that of a fountain overflowing with thanksgiving to the source of our life.

This, then, is the central idea of Colossians. Christ is all we need, therefore, walk in Him. Trust Him and allow Him to do His work in you. This is the life He desires for you.

I would encourage you to memorise these two verses. If you take away nothing else from this study of Colossians but this, I will be happy! May these verses remind you, not only to walk in Him, but also of all that God has done to make that walk possible. You are never on your own!

