

Continue to Live in Christ

Colossians 2:6-23

Key Verse: 2:6, 7

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

Today’s passage evokes a serious question: “Am I fully committed to Christ?” This was a problem for the Colossian believers. They had received Christ Jesus as Lord. But they were still vulnerable to false teachers who tried to entice them toward another way of life. They were confused and could easily be deceived. They needed to know Christ and take root in him. In other words, they needed to commit themselves to Christ. In order to help them, Paul exposed the emptiness of the false teachings and revealed that all the fullness of the Deity is found in Christ. Like the Colossians, many young people today are also confused. They know that Christ is good, but all of the other religions and philosophies seem to be good as well. So they hesitate to commit themselves to Christ, wondering, “Is there some other better way than Christ?” Some think, “Christ is good, but I won’t commit now. I should experience many things and then come back to Christ, maybe after retirement.” After spending all our time and talents to enjoy the pleasures of sin, what is left? Shall we give our leftovers to Christ? In today’s passage Paul urges us to commit ourselves to Christ. We can learn why it is important and how to do so.

I. Rooted and built up in Christ (6-7)

Verse 6 says, **“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him....”** The Colossians had received Christ Jesus as Lord, supreme over all, the only Lord - not one of many lords. This is important. One man in India accepted Christ as Lord. His Bible teacher was very happy. Then he said, “Jesus is my 102nd Lord.” However, Christ Jesus is the one and only Lord over all things. There is no other Lord. All other lords are man-made idols; there is no life in them. But Christ Jesus is living. He is the source of life, both as Creator and Redeemer. After receiving Christ Jesus as Lord, what should we do? It seems that we have to do something. One influential leader has taught the Bible to others for many years, without seeing much visible change in them. So he felt that Bible teaching was not enough, and that he needed to give them some kind of discipline and involve them in activities. It is tempting to make rules to help others grow. But Paul said in verse 6b, **“...continue to live your lives in him....”** This means to continue to know Christ through Bible study. We need to continue to know Christ,

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experience Christ, and to have intimate fellowship with Christ that is deeper, wider, and higher. The word “continue” implies endurance and patience. Christ in us is working quietly and faithfully. All we have to do is keep going without stopping, without wondering “What is going on?” We should believe that the work of Christ is going on, steadily and powerfully. This reminds us of Jesus' parable of the growing seed. In a seed, there is life. It grows by its own power day and night. So all we have to do is to plant the seed, water the seed, and sometimes pull up weeds. Christ in us is doing his own work. The phrases “in him,” or “in Christ,” or “with him” are repeated eight times (6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 12, 17). We just need to continue to live in him. Verse 7 teaches how. It says, “...rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

First, rooted in Christ. By using the word “root” Paul implies the metaphor of a tree. Just as a tree needs to take root in the ground in order to grow, so a Christian needs to take root in Christ in order to grow. The growth of a tree depends primarily on the root. If the root is bad, the tree is sick and dying, even though it may look beautiful. As human beings, the issue is where we take root. The Colossians were being tempted to take root in many other things, such as angel worship, Jewish legalism and asceticism. But these things do not have life. Ultimately, they are nothing but an illusion. Historically, people have proposed many good ideas, but as time passed they turned out to be empty. In the 18th century, the Enlightenment promised paradise through the conquest of nature by man using his superior, rational mind. Technology developed rapidly and people fell into the illusion that all human problems would be solved by technology. However, this was not the case, as World Wars I and II reveal. In the 20th century, the American Dream based on capitalism was the aspiration of many. It motivated people to work hard. But in the end, for many, the dream turned into a nightmare. At the same time, Communism was promising paradise, especially to Russian people. But by the end of the 20th century Communism had disappeared, and those who had trusted in it were totally disillusioned. These days relativism is the popular philosophy and tolerance its mantra. People claim that there is no absolute truth, so no one can insist on their own idea. They teach that we must embrace all kinds of ideas without passing judgment. In this social milieu, it is hard to find the right things to take root in. So, most people wander aimlessly without commitment to anything, maximizing pleasure. It seems to offer freedom. But in fact, it is just another human idea. Finally it leads to chaos and destruction. In contrast, those who take root in Christ can grow and bear fruit in any situation. They are like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season - whatever they do prospers (Ps 1:2-3). How, then, can we take root in Christ?

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In John 15:5 Jesus says, **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”** Then in John 15:7, Jesus teaches that to remain in him is to remain in his word (Jn 15:7). This means to hold on to Jesus’ words as a matter of life and death. When we face difficult problems and persecution, as we hold on to Jesus’ words, the words give us strength, power and wisdom to overcome all kinds of hardships. Furthermore, to remain in Jesus is also to remain in Jesus’ love (Jn 15:9). Usually, when difficulty comes, people doubt God’s love. They think, “If God loves me, why did this happen?” When we doubt God’s love, we cannot remain in Jesus; we fall into temptation. On the other hand, those who remain in Jesus’ love always think, “God loves me. Because God loves me he gives such hardship.” Those who remain in his love can confess with Paul: **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us”** (Ro 8:35-37).

Second, built up in Christ. In verse 7, Paul also uses the metaphor of a building to describe continuing in Christ. In building a house, the foundation is crucial. If the foundation is firm, the building lasts long. Those who build their lives on Christ can bear all kinds of pressure and stress, even death. But those who build on something else will crash in the time of life's trials, and especially at the time of death. Christ is the only solid foundation of our lives (1 Cor 3:11). Those who lay a foundation on Christ cannot be shaken by anything. How can we build up on Christ? Jesus said, **“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock”** (Mt 7:24). We must hear Jesus’ words and put them into practice.

Third, being strengthened in the faith and overflowing with thankfulness. In order to continue to live in Christ we need to be strengthened in the faith. Our faith can be strengthened, like a muscle that grows stronger through exercise. If our muscles are weak, our body will be powerless and susceptible to illness. But if our muscles are strong, we can be healthy and work hard. Likewise, when our faith is strong, we can overcome all false teachings and temptations. Then how can our faith be strengthened? The words “as you were taught” indicate that our faith is strengthened when we live according to the word of God. Our faith is closely related to the word of God. Without feeding on the word of God our faith cannot grow strong. Faith is also related to thankfulness. When our faith is strong and healthy, we are thankful. But when our faith is weak, we are vulnerable to complaints. To complain makes one miserable and a bad influence to others.

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Complaining people are like those who carry a deadly disease. But those who are thankful are happy and encourage others. They are like those who have a wonder drug that can heal and strengthen others. Complaining and thankfulness are both contagious. Which one do you want to spread? Paul said not only to be thankful, but to be overflowing with thankfulness. How can we overflow with thankfulness? Thankfulness may begin with one thanksgiving topic, like a single drop of water. As we continue to find thanksgiving topics, it becomes a trickle. Finally, we can be overflowing with thankfulness like a rushing stream. Complaining comes very naturally. We don't need to struggle to complain. The problem is that when we complain, Satan works. In dirty water, many kinds of bacteria are produced. Likewise, when we are full of complaints, Satan works to make us miserable, and to destroy our character, personality, family and community. Only one medicine cures this kind of disease: thankfulness--overflowing thankfulness. All kinds of infirmities can be cleansed when we are overflowing with thankfulness. This is true in our personal lives, our families and our community as well.

II. The reality is found in Christ (8-23)

In verses 8-23, we see the contrast between false teaching and Christ. This contrast assures us that commitment to Christ is truly wise.

First, hollow and deceptive philosophies (8, 16-23). Verse 8 describes false teachings in general. It says, “**See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.**” The words “elemental spiritual forces” are repeated twice (8, 20), and refer to false teaching handed down as human tradition, which can ultimately be traced to the demonic influence. It seems to be dynamic, giving answers to life's problems. Those who spread these teachings are eloquent and persuasive, like the modern guru Tony Robbins. Many people seek their help, and they offer seemingly profound advice. But in actuality it is hollow and deceptive. Specifically, Paul warned against three false teachings in verses 16-23.

Jewish legalism (16-17). Jewish legalists judged others based on what they ate or drank, and on the observance of Jewish religious festivals, New Moon celebrations or Sabbath days (16). They insisted on all these things as a matter of salvation. To eat or drink is related to the clean and unclean foods in the book of Leviticus. Religious festivals refer to all the sacred days of the Jews, such as Passover, Pentecost, the Feast of Tabernacles, and so on. They taught that the Sabbath day must be kept absolutely. But verse 17 says, “**These are a shadow of the things**

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that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” When the reality comes, the shadow is not needed any longer. All these things are fulfilled in Christ Jesus. So all we have to do is to accept what Jesus has done for us and to live by faith.

Angel worship (18-19). Verses 18-19 are a warning against the worship of angels. Those who worshiped angels claimed that, in order to approach the Holy, Almighty Creator God, people needed angels as mediators. In this way they nullified Christ as the only mediator (1 Ti 2:5). Such people talked a lot about their spiritual experiences, visions and mystical insights. But their unspiritual mind puffed up with idle notions. They became proud. They seemed humble, but it was a false humility. In truth, they only speculated in the realm of notions, and didn't do anything productive. Paul says that they had lost connection with the head, Christ. Only those who are connected with Christ receive spiritual nutrition and grow, as God causes them to grow. They participate in the body of Christ, which is joined together in love, just as sinews and ligaments hold the bones of our bodies together.

Asceticism (20-23). The underlying philosophy of asceticism is dualism, which claims that spirit is good and matter, including the body, is evil. This is the basis of both hedonism and asceticism. Hedonism makes no attempt to ameliorate the body, but promotes wickedness without restraint. Asceticism teaches that the body is evil, so it must be treated harshly by beating, torturing, and so on. Ascetics made all kinds of rules and regulations, such as **“Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”** They thought that by keeping these rules they could make themselves pure and righteous. But verse 22 says, **“These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings.”** They have an appearance of wisdom, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. Man's sinful desires cannot be controlled by rules and regulations. We need a right view of the body. Our bodies are the temple of God, where God dwells (1 Cor 6:19). We should not offer the parts of our body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but to God as instruments of righteousness (Ro 6:13). The problem with all of these false teachings is that they cause us to lose connection with the head, Christ. Then we lose our source of life and cannot grow.

Second, the fullness of the Deity in Christ (9-15). As we have seen, false teachings are hollow and deceptive. In contrast, there is in Christ all the fullness of the Deity. How does this relate to us?

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In the first place, we receive fullness in Christ (9-10). Verses 9-10 say, “**For 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.**” Jesus’ incarnation, his life, his personality, his ministry, his death and resurrection, his ascension and reign - these all reveal the fullness of the Deity. When believers receive Christ, they receive the fullness of the Deity in him. Since he is the head over every power and authority, they have access to mighty strength. 2 Peter 1:3-4 say, “**His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life...he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.**” Through Christ everything we need for life and godliness has been given to us. In the past we were doomed due to our corruption. But God delivered us from the darkness and brought us into his wonderful light. As we participate in his divine nature, we can enjoy a holy and godly life.

In the second place, we are a new creation in Christ (11-12). Verses 11-12 explain how we became full in Christ. Paul says that we were circumcised, not by human hands, but by Christ. This circumcision was not just removing a bit of flesh. It was cutting away the whole self, ruled by the flesh. Spiritual circumcision refers to baptism. Baptism here means union with Christ through his death and resurrection. When Christ died on the cross, we died with him. When Christ was buried, we were buried with him. When Christ was raised from the dead, we were raised from the dead with him. Through baptism we are united with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. Our old self has died and a new self has been born. So we are a new creation in Christ Jesus. The old has gone, and the new has come (2 Cor 5:17).

In the third place, we have life and victory through the cross (13-15). Verses 13-15 teach us how God made us alive. We were dead in our sins and ruled over by our flesh. But God made us alive with Christ. How did he do this? In order to make us alive, our sin problem had to be solved. Sin requires death, for the wages of sin is death. We have a debt to pay for our sins. We understand debt. Many people are deeply in debt with home mortgages and school loans. This debt is like a heavy weight around the neck that crushes people. But we all have a more serious debt than this. It is the debt of sin. The Bible compares us to a man who owed 10,000 talents, which is about 200,000 years’ wages for a day laborer. We live less than 100 years. Even if we work hard 12 hours a day, seven days a week all our lifetime, we cannot even pay the interest on our debt. So we were doomed to go into eternal punishment. This heavy debt condemned us night and day. But God had mercy on us. Verse 13b says, “**He forgave us all our sins.**” Moreover,

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verse 14b says, “...he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.” He wiped our record clean. Our criminal record as a sinner, which followed us wherever we went, has been erased completely.

Furthermore, God gave us great victory. Verse 15 reads, “**And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.**” Here, “powers and authorities” refer to Satan and the evil angels. Since Adam’s fall, man became a slave of Satan. Satan used the power of death to torment people and make us fearful and useless (Heb 2:14). When Jesus was nailed to the cross, Satan thought he won the victory. But Christ rose from the dead, crushing Satan’s head, winning eternal victory over him, as well as sin and death. In this way, Christ disarmed Satan and exposed his defeat publicly. In the past the cross was a symbol of shame. But through Jesus’ victory, the cross has become the symbol of glory. Now we can live a truly victorious life. In the past, we were always defeated in the end. Even the richest, most successful person bowed down before the power of death. But Jesus conquered death and gave us victory over its power. He has given us eternal life. We have life and victory through the cross of Jesus. That is why Apostle Paul sang a song of victory: “**Where, o death, is your victory? Where, o death, is your sting? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**” We can live a victorious life, not just for a day or a month, or for a year, but eternally.

In this passage we have learned the importance of continuing to live in Christ. In order to do this, we need to commit ourselves to Christ fully. Some hesitate out of fear of being changed, fear of losing something, or love for the sinful nature. But Christ calls us to full commitment and a most fruitful life. Life is an investment. Those who invest their lives in Christ never regret, are never ruined, and gain everything in the end. Jesus promised, “**Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it**” (Mk 8:35). So let’s invest our lives in Christ and have a guaranteed return of eternal life.

Time is crucial for investment. We need to invest our lives while we are young. If we wait until we are old, our value reduces. When we invest our lives while we are young, full of energy and strength, then our futures will surely be blessed. Many Christian leaders committed themselves to Christ at an early age: Count Zinzendorf at age 8, Charles Spurgeon at age 17, John Calvin wrote his “Institutes” at age 21, Jonathan Edwards began preaching regularly at age 19, Mother Barry went as a missionary at age 25. They committed themselves to Christ, bore much fruit, and lived the most abundant and happiest lives. They gave

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a great spiritual influence to so many people throughout the generations. This is why we need to commit ourselves to the Lord as soon as possible. Let's commit ourselves to Christ and continue to live in him.