

The Core: Living with Jesus at the Center

“Rooted in Him”

Colossians 2:6-7

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6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving (Col 2:6-7).

One of the painful moments of closing up my church office at Calvary was sorting out my counseling files. I had a lot of them, and every file had a story. Many times the stories were of amazing transformations, but that was not always the case. In fact, I think it is safe to say that about fifty percent of my files contained the stories of people who didn't make it. Their marriages fell apart, went back to their addictive behavior, ran from their problems, gave up on their kids, or decided that Christianity wasn't for them. It is sad but true: some people are not rooted in Christ.

Have you ever had a conversation with someone that goes like this: “Hey, where are Jim and Sue? I haven't seen them in a long time?” Or take the last pictorial directory and look through it and see who is missing. Now I know some people have connected to another church, but that isn't the case with everyone. There are some people, who for a variety of reasons, have simply said, “I'm done with Jesus.”

So how we help people, our kids, and new converts stay strong in the Lord? That is the question that we are tackling today.

Today we bring to close our section called Jesus-centered ministry which was a study of 1:24-2:7. In this portion of our examination of Colossians we have attempted to discover the ways in which Paul applies his Christology (doctrine of Christ) to ministry. In other words we've been trying to learn how a radical Christ-centeredness affects every area of life, but especially the way that ministry happens.

Our first message (1:24-26) was a call to learn how Jesus-centeredness changes our approach to suffering or afflictions. Nate's message (1:27-29) reminded us about the mystery of the ministry: Christ in you the hope of glory. And last week (2:1-5) Joe Bartemus laid before you a call live out your Christ centeredness by embracing maturity.

You really get a sense of Paul's pastoral heart in this section as he applies the centrality of Christ to the pastoral concerns that he has for this body of believers. Remember that the

reason that the entire book was written was to combat a subtle drift in their thinking about the importance and centrality of Jesus. Paul will fully take this to task in beginning in 2:8 – “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 is concerned about their thinking and their living, and how they’ve begun to drift.

Our text for this morning is a transitional passage linking Jesus-centered ministry and Jesus-centered thinking. Paul is calling this church to connect the centrality of Christ to their lives. **Therefore what we find here is that Jesus-centered ministry is a call to help people connect Christ to life for life.** In other words, getting Christ at the core means that we are constantly building connections in people’s minds between life and the supremacy of Christ; it is helping people know how to follow Jesus.

Paul does this in two ways: first, he reminds them of what they have received, and secondly he describes what walking (living) looks like.

What We’ve Received (v 6)

The first step in helping people to remain rooted in Christ over the long haul is to remind them about what is really important. In the midst of a culture that was throwing so many different ideas, philosophies, spiritual concepts at them Paul wanted to remind them what they were given. You could think about it almost as if Paul says, “Okay. Let me take you back to the basics.”

That is why verse six starts out with the word “therefore.” Paul identified in verses four and five that he was glad that they were standing firm in their faith in Christ, and that they were resisting the deluding, plausible arguments that were swirling around them.

4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ (Col 2:4-5).

It really helps me when Paul or some other Biblical author gives me little nuggets that remind me as to what is really important. In fact I think that is why this series on Colossians has been helpful for us. It has reconnected us to the importance of focusing on Jesus. It really bothers me how easy it is for my heart to lose its focus. This usually happens in one of two ways:

- 1) **Truth deficiency** – we start believing something about Jesus that isn’t true or what we believe about Jesus isn’t correctly balanced. For example much of what John

writes in 1 John is to combat the error that Jesus was fully God but not fully man. C.S. Lewis said, "Old error in new dress, is error nonetheless."

- 2) **Trust deficiency** – this is far more common. It happens when the real and practical trust of our hearts is not really on Jesus but on the forms that we created to lead us to Jesus. So we end up building a ministry structure that was supposed to be about Jesus, but over time the focus becomes about the form not the reality. Usually what happens is that we become too emotionally attached to things that worked for us, seemed to work for others, or have worked historically. And our focus becomes on methods and not on the Master.

I say all of this because of the meaning of the word "received." It certainly includes the idea of receiving Christ personally, but it means even more. The Greek word (*paralambano*) means to receive from another, and it carries with it the nuance of receiving a tradition, something that was handed down.

I think that you would agree with me that "tradition" is a loaded term. For some it means an important connection to the past; something that has value and shouldn't be changed; something to which you attach emotional importance. For example, our family has some traditions that we typically do on our family vacation. For the last few years we've done a time capsule where we write down the important events of our camping experience and we bury it somewhere and then find it the following year. We usually go to the County Bump-n-Run, which is an interesting blend of a short-circuit car race and a crash derby. This year we decided not to do the Bump-n-Run, and we had to explain it carefully to our kids because it was a tradition. The church is filled with those kinds of things. Most are good.

However Paul wants to remind them and us that there is one "tradition", one thing that matters more than anything else: Christ Jesus the Lord. So connecting Christ to life for life means that there may be many other helpful traditions there really is only one vital tradition – Christ Jesus the Lord. The "tradition" of our lives must be that Jesus is most important! Things get really messed up when we start living emotionally and practically with other things as more important than Christ Jesus the Lord. So we have received a tradition that is fundamentally Jesus-centered. You could state it like this: my tradition is Christ Jesus the Lord.

Now what do we mean by Christ Jesus the Lord? Those are pretty familiar terms for most of us, but do you know what they mean?

- Christ – the word means "anointed by God" or "the Messiah." It was used in the Old Testament for kings and rulers, people upon whom God placed his power and authority. So you could think on this term as identifying Jesus as God's chosen and anointed servant.

- Jesus – this is the personal name for our Lord. It is the Greek name for the Hebrew name Joshua which means the Lord is salvation. So every time we say “Jesus” we are confessing that he is our salvation and that “there is no other name under heaven...by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).
- The Lord – the original language doesn’t just read “Lord.” It reads “the Lord”, capturing the powerful truth that Jesus is unparalleled in his sovereignty, supremacy, rule, and authority.

So what am I saying when I make this statement: my tradition is Christ Jesus the Lord? I am saying that Jesus is the core of everything in the universe, in God’s redemptive plan, and my life. Everything revolves around him. I’m saying that there is no one greater, no one more attractive, no one more worthy, and no one more sufficient. I’m saying that he’s the center of creation and redemption, the center of substitution and justification, the center of sanctification and the goal of glorification. It means that only Jesus could be that beautiful blend of sovereign power and gentle grace.

It means that while there are many things that I love about life and ministry, it all pales in comparison to him. It means that every good thing I receive in life or anything that I experience on Sunday should draw me to him. It means that our aim of everything, especially preaching, should be to point you to Christ. I want you leaving Sunday morning worship saying, “Wow did we meet with Jesus today!” The songs, the preaching, the praying, the ministry updates are conduits to point us to one tradition – Christ Jesus the Lord!

If we get this—I mean really get this—then living it out just makes sense. Paul says, “walk in him.” It is a command; something that just makes sense when you realize who you are following. The word walk is often used in the Bible to describe how a person lives or behaves (see Gal 5:16 and Rom 14:15).

Your walk is often a pretty good indication of what happening on the inside of your heart and mind. Savannah knows the “you’re in trouble” walk and the “Daddy’s going to get you” walk. And Paul is commanding here that there must be a direct connection between who Jesus is and how we walk or live.

Therefore, there are at least two things that are worth mentioning here in terms of applications:

1. **A lack of connection between Christ and your life is not normal!** I mean that Jesus is supposed to take over your life, and what you hear on Sunday is supposed to be worked out in how you live. Now that doesn’t mean that you are going to be perfect. But it does mean that if you can come week after week, make no connection to your life, rarely feel conviction, or hardly ever feel motivated to do anything – you need to know that is not good. I don’t worry about the person who knows how bad they are,

feels conviction, struggles, and even fails but keeps trying. I worry about the person who comes and church is just what they do.

2. **The solution to a faltering walk is focusing more on Jesus, not more on yourself.** The tradition that you've received is Christ Jesus the Lord. Therefore, focus on Him. There is a tendency when your walk is faltering to try and figure out what is going on, why you are stuck, or to determine the cause. Let me save you a lot of time. The problem is sin – yours or someone else's—and the best remedy for both is to focus on Christ. A new book, an accountability partner, getting counseling, an additional sermon, memorizing Scripture, or fasting are not going to work if you try to use them to replace your need to focus on Christ.

The older I get the more I realize that I'm not very good at figuring anything out, including me! And I have discovered that the best solution to a faltering walk is to start focusing more on Jesus – knowing him, loving him, singing to him, praying to him—and less on what's going on with me.

So what tradition are you? You know, I want you to be proud (in the right sense) that you are a part of College Park Church. I want you excited about the life change that you experience every week, and I want you inviting people you love to come here because I believe that God is really at work here. One of the things that have led to God's hand being on this place over the years is a tradition I don't want to ever lose. It is the tradition of the centrality of Jesus Christ the Lord.

It is very important that we help people to be rooted in Jesus because everything else will eventually be disappointing. Pastors are human; they make mistakes. Churches are organizations; they aren't always effective. Traditions, while meaningful, change. Ultimately the only focal point that is really worthy deep roots is Jesus.

What Walking Looks Like (v 7)

The second thing that Paul does here is to identify what "walking in Him" looks like. He puts some handles on it for us by providing four descriptions of how we are to walk: rooted, built-up, established, and abounding in thanksgiving.

The first three words are all passive, pointing to the fact that God is the one who is doing the work while the final description—abounding in thanksgiving—is active. The other interesting thing to note about these descriptions is that Paul uses three different metaphors. He uses metaphors that are agricultural (rooted), architectural (built-up), and judicial (established) to help us understand what walking in Christ looks like.

Let's quickly look at each of them:

Dependence (Rooted)

To be rooted in Christ means that believers have been firmly connected to Jesus, like a branch is connected to a vine (John 15). The word is in the perfect tense which mean that this “rooting” was something that happened in the past with present implications. To be rooted in Christ means that our spiritual life is directly connected to him – positionally and practically. It is living out the reality of your position in Christ.

20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:20)

Let me remind you again that spiritual maturity is not become more independent; it is becoming more dependent!

Growth (Built-Up)

To be built up in him means that there is a solid foundation upon which construction is happening. There is growth and progress, but it is only as good as the foundation upon which it is built.

There seems to be some connection between these two words – rooted and built up. Both imply progress (e.g., a plant grows, a building is built), but to be built up certainly points toward a goal. A tree that loses its roots topples, but a building that is only partially built is an eye-sore. Paul calls believers to grow in such a way that visible progress is evident. He calls us not be content with a partially constructed spiritual life. People who know who Jesus is keep building their spiritual lives.

Increasing Strength (Established)

The idea here is that our walk results in incremental increases in spiritual strength. Since it is directly connected to “in the faith”, the phrase means that there is an ever-growing confidence in the content of what we believe. In other words, the more you experience the power of the Word, the more you come to trust it.

Walking in Christ and being established in the faith means that you have a greater trust in the promises of God. Maturity is marked by having less confidence in yourself and a greater confidence in the Word. The Psalmist says the same thing in 119:28 – “My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word!”

Abundant Gratitude (Abounding in Thanksgiving)

The final characteristic of walking in Christ is an abundance of gratitude. The word for abounding means to be in excess, to excel, or to cause to super-abound. Now it is important to remember that the former three descriptions (rooted, built-up, and established) were all in the passive voice. However this one is not; it is active. Therefore, all of the other characteristics are done to you, but this is the one in which we are to aggressively, actively, and excessively participate.

Walking in Christ must be characterized by abundant gratitude or you really do not understand what kind of walk you are walking. To be rooted in Christ means that we continually make connections of gratitude to more and more things in our lives. Helping people connect Christ to life for life means helping them see that everything we have is a gift from Christ.

You see this is what we have to help people understand about walking in Him:

- Dependence – I grow more dependant, not less
- Growth – I need to get serious about the natural process of spiritual growth
- Strength – I need to see trials as an opportunity to be strengthened by the Word
- Gratitude – I need to see that it needs to be the flavor of my life

When we recognize Jesus as the core, he transforms everything. He comes and takes over. And Jesus-centered ministry is helping people make connections between who Jesus is and where they live.

So let's be sure that we live this way and lead this way and teach this way. Let's do marriage this way. Let's raise kids this way. Let's do evangelism this way.

Let's be sure that the flavor of our lives is Christ Jesus the Lord. He's my tradition; He's how I live.

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