

THE MYSTERY OF LIFE IN JESUS

The great paradox of Christian living, the statement that defines the difficulty of a life for Christ, is the statement:

Jesus does it all, and we have a role.

The reason why this is so hard is because it is truly impossible to understand. In our limited capacity, you either do something or you don't. You either have control or you are controlled. You are responsible, or it is someone else's responsibility. In our line of thinking, we honestly have no framework for the statement that Paul makes to end the first chapter of Colossians:

For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Paul is struggling and toiling, he is doing the work, but he is working with the energy and power of the Spirit.

And so today we are going to attempt to put this relationship in a structure where we can wrestle with it. Not fully understand the mystery, but get what the truth is so that we can struggle with it. Here we go, **Colossians 2**, starting in **v.6**:

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

In these two verses, Paul summarizes the entirety of the letter. I would go so far as to say, that in these two verses, Paul makes the thesis statement for ALL of his writings. So we will be digging deep into these two verses, and showing how the rest of the section acts as a support to what he is saying here.

The Therefore

We will start with the first word: THEREFORE. There are certain words that say a lot more than what is contained within them. Words such as and, but, so, don't have a ton of value in themselves, but hold power by way of what they do. These words are called CONJUNCTIONS, and they tie together two ideas that otherwise might be seen as separate.

As we come to the therefore here, we find a word that holds together the two great pieces of this letter. In step with the form of Paul's letters, Colossians is divided into two parts. The first part, what we have been doing so far, is to give definition and depth to the gospel. It may seem that over the last month things have been a bit redundant. THEY HAVE. And it is because Paul has been giving nuance and layering the richness of the gospel. And he ALWAYS starts here because you must always build foundation up. Once the foundation is firm, you can add to it.

The therefore marks the transition from the explanation of the gospel to the reaction of the gospel. In other words, we are moving into the do's that flow out of the done. NOW THAT YOU KNOW, HERE IS WHAT YOU DO. And Paul constantly attaches these two. He goes on in **v.6**:

The Gift

As you received Christ Jesus the Lord

This refers back to what we have been focusing on; THE GOSPEL. The treasure that we have received. The unsearchable riches. And Paul carries all of this over in the way that he describes Jesus in this verse, CHRIST JESUS THE LORD. He is not just Jesus. He is not just Christ. He is not just Lord. In this Paul attacks all of the incomplete descriptions of Jesus. He doesn't allow for a shorthand or a character. He is all three...He is:

JESUS

To what does the proper name Jesus refer? Jesus is God incarnate. To refer to Jesus is to attack all of the ethereal, spiritualized, I believe in a higher power aspect of God. The idea that there is a God out there, but I don't know who He is. God is not just some form that we have no idea about, He is Jesus. A man who really lived, who much of Paul's audience would have been alive to witness. So Jesus grounds God. By that I mean, Jesus reveals in a very real tangible way, for our limited minds, what our God is like. **V.9-10** are added to flesh out this aspect of the Character of the son:

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Jesus was a person, but He was more than that. In Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. He is fully God. So when Jesus acts, it is God acting. When Jesus speaks, it is God speaking. And when Jesus is murdered on the cross, it is God hanging from that tree. And what He was doing there is what makes Him the Christ.

CHRIST

The word Christ means *anointed one*, or *Messiah*. Attaching the title Christ to Jesus connected this man to Israel's history. It is saying that this God-man is the promised one. It means that the body that was laid in the tomb was the one who would bring about the fulfillment of the promise. What promise? All through the OT, in all of God's dealings with His people, He was constantly looking forward. There were references to a great king who would come to rule with authority and bring great peace. **Isaiah 9.6-7** is an example of this:

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

So when we see Jesus come into Jerusalem, with the people waving branches and shouting Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, we recognize that they are recognizing Him as the promised one. When the people try to crown Him king, it is because they want Him to take the authority that had been prophesied. And when John the Baptist sends people to ask, *Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?*, Jesus answers by pointing out how He was fulfilling the signs of the promise.

But John's question brings up another issue, which is, Jesus was nothing like what they expected. The reason why he has to ask if Jesus is the one is because the Christ was supposed to be a little more triumphant. He was not the Jewish Rambo that they were wanting. He was here to punish His enemies, not theirs. And Paul's description of His work in **v.11** is just as puzzling:

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh

This is how Paul describes the Christ. Now you may think, I have read the gospels, I have been to a lot of Easter services, and you may have even seen the Passion of the Christ, and I don't remember anything about circumcision. Well, again, it is because you aren't reading with the eyes and ears of a first century Jew.

The references to circumcision would have been very clear to them, and to the Gentiles living in Colossae, as this was the defining characteristic of God's people. The Jews were trying to claim that they were the only true people of God, and making the Gentiles take part in the physical sign. They were claiming that the Gentiles were less. They were still holding to the fact that they alone were God's people by nature of the physical sign of circumcision.

Anyway, Christ came to *establish [his kingdom] and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore*. We see this establishment of His kingdom, His people, in the cutting off, and setting apart of circumcision. In the same way that God set His people apart in the OT through the physical sign of circumcision, He has set His people apart through a circumcision of the heart, performed by no human hands, but by Christ Himself. The whole rite was a sign of the things to come. We are able to be His people, to be part of His kingdom because of the completed work of the anointed one.

LORD

And he continues to rule over His kingdom as Lord. Redemption was accomplished at the cross, the circumcision of the flesh was complete, and your identity was changed. You are now part of a new kingdom, and that kingdom has a king, A LORD. Paul describes it this way in **v.12**:

having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Our lives have changed. We no longer live for ourselves in this world. We have been purchased, and that means that we are now owned by a new Lord. We have been made alive in Him, meaning we are dead to our old selves.

All of this is well and good to say, but what it means is life changing. It means that our identity in Christ replaces our previous identity. We often come to Jesus to fix this part of our lives, or add meaning to this piece. But the gospel is about identity transfer, not identity improvement. It is not about adding little aspects to what you already have figured out. It is about dying to yourself. Giving up the old life to be buried with Him, so that you may also be raised with Him. It is a trade. And to be a trade, we NEED to give something up. But this trade is a no-brainer. What we are trading is our filthy lives, to be part of the great plan drawn up before the creation of the world by the God who reigns over all things. In baptism we actively proclaim this trade: that we have given up our old life to receive His.

In receiving Christ Jesus the Lord, we have been given a relationship with God, a salvation from our sin, and a righteous authority for the rest of our existence. And in receiving this gift, we are also given new responsibility. Paul goes on in **v.6** to say:

The Imperative

so walk in him.

This is the first imperative that we have come across in this letter. Up to this point, everything has been the proclamation of the gospel, the definition of the Christian, and the nature of the church. They have been descriptions. **THIS IS AN ACTIVE COMMAND.** But it is not a command that is separate from the descriptions. Once again we have that connector word SO. Our walking, our good works flow out of the fact that we have received Him.

It is not possible to follow the commands of God without Jesus. We cannot walk in Him, without Him. The law of God cannot be separated from God because it is designed to bring us to God. The purpose of His Law is to show us His will, reveal to us His character, and to give us a way to glorify Him (by choosing His will over our own). The fact that we can even walk is because of Him. Paul builds on this in **v.13-14**:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

So we were dead. And dead people don't walk. We were buried under the record of debt. We were slaves to our sin, and God made us alive. He nailed our sins to the cross so that we can now walk free of the bondage that previously held us down.

And walking means that we slowly but surely put one foot in front of the other. It is not a matter of having everything figured out, but trudging through. It is about not giving up. Because that is the default. That is the danger. And that is what Paul is working against as we move on in **v.7**:

The Process

rooted and built up in him and established in the faith just as you were taught

Paul says that walking in Jesus will produce three side effects:

1. Being Rooted
2. Built Up in Him
3. Established in the faith

And in the next verse Paul makes it clear why we need to be anchored in Christ, because there are other options out there. There are a lot of ways to walk. He warns:

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 does a really cool thing here as he uses **v.7** to encourage them in the positive traits that will protect them from the pitfalls that he warns them of in **v.8**. I am going to take the tree analogy that Paul uses here to explain how this all works together. To show how walking in Christ Jesus our Lord, being firmly rooted in Him, Built up in Him, and established in Him will help us to combat empty deceit, human tradition, and the elemental spirits of the world.

BEING ROOTED

First the roots continue to grow. In the Christian life the roots refer to deeper and fuller trust and faith in Jesus Christ. It's the *full assurance of understanding and the*

knowledge of God's mystery that Paul wished for them last week. Just as important as the depth of the root system is the soil that they exist in. We are all developing root systems, but too many of us are digging into soil that cannot hold.

I used to love to take a nice drive along Pioneer Highway just South of Stanwood. Down in the flats, in that area that fills up every time it floods, someone had reclaimed some land as a forest. It appeared that they were growing trees for lumber to sell. The problem is, the trees got taller, and the roots developed, but the soil was wet and weak, and when the windstorm came, it took out almost every tree in that lot. Where we root is important.

And so the philosophy and empty deceit Paul refers to are the world's alternative soils. It is the ideas of beauty, happiness, and fulfillment that we are sold. It is the sleeping with your boyfriend will make you happy, money will make you complete, success will lead you to joy load of crap that we buy into. By referring to it as empty deceit, Paul points to the hollowness of its claims. Earthly ideas offers a lot and never pay up. So they promise more somewhere else...but it is an endless maze. And we get stuck in it. Paul says root yourself in the gospel. Because in anything else your life will collapse. And if you think you can do 50/50, somehow establishing yourself in both the philosophy of the world and the truth of God, that tree tips over too.

BUILT UP IN HIM

We need to continue to build, to grow. A great root system without growth is called a stump. And while they are great for sitting on, as The Giving Tree so aptly point out, they are not healthy. The growth of a tree is the development of a life that looks like that of the savior. We will grow through the habit of walking in Him, to actually resemble Him. But the important thing is not just that we grow, but that we grow rightly. We all have habits, and many of them are bad habits. To continue to be built in the proper way, we must build in the way that God commands. We must not chart our own path to growth.

We just moved into a new house and I am doing my best to get the yard and trees under control. One of the trees is a pear tree. Fruit trees are interesting because their ability to grow fruit is related to how they are growing. As the branches get to long, they sap all of the energy of the tree so the fruit cannot develop. They also grow long and slender, to the point that even if fruit could grow, it would weigh the branches down and snap them off. There is a specific way that they need to develop and be pruned so that they may bear good fruit. And we are the same way.

This is what happens when we attempt to grow by human tradition. In other words, we build the things of God using the tools of men. So we want to grow in holiness, we do it by self help. We want to build the church, we do it by the means of a business model. We want to see people come to Christ, we do it by means of propaganda and persuasion. We must not only build things that are for God, but we must grow in the ways that God commands, not in the ways that we think will most quickly get us to the

desired result. We need to be rooted in the truth, but we also need to grow in a truthful way. We need to seek God in the process as well as the result. And this will lead to an established faith.

ESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH

Established in the faith is what happens when we are rooted well and growing properly. Being established means not being shaken and changed by the winds that blow. It is the natural outcome of walking in Him.

It is like the great redwoods in California. I am not sure if you have been privileged enough to have ever seen these, but these massive trees have grown over hundreds and thousands of years. As they grew up, they have also expanded. Each year another ring is added as the tree expands. So the roots continue to form, the trunk grows taller, AND the tree must add to itself, continue to bolster that which had already grown. The most striking pictures of the redwoods are those ones with a road cut through them. There at the trunk, they have grown so wide and strong, that you can cut a hole through them and the tree will stand. If you have ever met an established Christian, you will recognize it. They seem humbly confident. Boldly gracious. They don't need your approval of their faith.

The final thing that Paul warns the Colossian church to stand against are the elemental spirits of this world, and they directly relate to this idea of expanding and being established. The elemental truths is a play on words, as it was Paul who had been charged with teaching nothing but the simple gospel. The people wanted more. They wanted to grow up. They wanted to branch out. They wanted Paul to give them the next step. And Paul reminds them, as we have seen, that it is in the constant depth of the gospel that we get growth. That moving on beyond this to teach the elemental spirits of the world, would be attempting to build up and out without having the strength to support it.

What this means is that in Paul's critics were people who were teaching a practical Christianity without preaching the gospel. They wanted to move on to the implications of the gospel without the gospel. They want to know:

1. How can I have peace in this life?
2. How can I be fixed?
3. How can I find happiness?

They want to know how to get the joy of the Christian life without Christ Jesus the Lord. They had a hard time really believing that Jesus, who died on the cross as our savior, could now be in control of all things, including their lives. They refused to submit their control in this growth, in this life, to His lordship.

And so what they did, WHAT WE DO, is attempt to gain the joy of Christ, apart from He who brings that joy. We try to grow for the sake of growing, not in order that we grow to be more like Him. We attempt to become established in everything but the faith.

Here's why it is so hard: we are to work, to walk, and to grow, but not so that we receive anything, but because we already have received everything. We work our jobs for a paycheck. We work on projects to see them to completion. We do because we know what we want the results to be and we know we can accomplish them.

The mystery of Life in Jesus is this, we work to accomplish nothing. We work our pants off to see God accomplish things in us and through us. We do what He says not knowing where it will lead, or what it will accomplish. And walking in Him will bring us to joy. Seeing Him working in our lives will make us glorify Him with a level of WONDER that never stops growing.

So Paul ends **v.7** reminding them to always be *abounding in thanksgiving*. Because if we reflect on what Jesus has done for us in Thanksgiving, it will give us the strength to keep working. If we focus on Him, it leads us to live for Him. When we draw near to Him, He draws near to us. When we desire Him, our desires become more for Him.

We are taken captive by all of the counterfeit gods Paul mentions when we stop focusing on the blessings of Christ. It is not that these things are so attractive in light of the gospel, it is that we choose to give them more attention. So as we grow, we must continue to build into the rich solid soil that is Jesus Christ. We must remember that we grow by submitting to His commands, His law, practicing His spiritual disciplines, we must grow in His way. And we will become established by constantly reminding ourselves of the things that God has done and is doing in our lives.