**Continue to Live in Christ**

June 23, 2013

Colossians 2:6-23

Key Verse 2:6 “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him.”

Last week we learned that Christ dwells in us. He comes into our hearts and changes us into his holy image. However, in order for Jesus to do his work, we must commit our lives to him. We should accept Jesus as our Lord. This means that we should give him the full control of our lives. Carrie Underwood sang the song, “Jesus takes the wheel.” We should let Jesus drive our lives. Will you trust him to drive your lives? Sometimes husbands and wives get in argument over driving. They become backseat drivers. [A backseat driver is a passenger in the back seat who is not controlling the vehicle, and seems to be uncomfortable with the skills of the driver and/or wants to tutor the driver while the driver is at the wheel.] When Jesus takes us to a strange place, we feel very uncomfortable and resist the change, and even try to take over the wheel. In today’s passage Paul admonishes the Colossians and us to continue to live in Jesus, trusting in him.

Look at verse 6. “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him.”

King James Version says, “Walk in him.” Walk indicates that our relationship with Christ is not to be stagnate but to be a growing relationship. The familiar term walk refers to daily conduct. In this context it emphasizes continuing to believe the truth about Christ, not allowing our faith in Christ’s deity and authority to waver. When Jesus is taking us to a strange place, we should trust him, without fear. In broader terms walking in Christ means living in union with him. It means to maintain a lifestyle patterned after his. 1 John 2:6 says, “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” When faced with the dilemmas that confront Christians in their daily lives, the guideline should be, “What would Jesus do in this situation?”

Verse 7 clarifies what it means to live in Christ. “…rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” First, rooted in Christ. In this agricultural metaphor, just as a tree is “rooted,” we are to be grounded in the soil of God’s Word. A tree puts down deep roots in order to find nutrition and to provide stability. Likewise, we must study his word deeply in order to find the fuel we need to flourish, and in order to withstand the storms of life. This image most likely comes from the beautiful picture in Jeremiah 17:8: “He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.” When we are rooted in a relationship with Christ, we will have everything we need for life and for godliness.

Second, build up in Christ. Paul next moves to a construction image to show that as our foundation is built on Christ, we must continue to add on so that we’re “being built up in him.” Ephesians 2:20 tells us that at conversion we were “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone.” God doesn’t want us to stop with conversion; instead he longs for us to construct our lives as 1 Corinthians 3:12 states with “gold, silver, and costly stones” instead of using things that don’t last like wood, hay, and straw. In order to be strong, we must build with solid materials. Again, the tense of the verb indicates that the building keeps on going. The Christian life is not meant to be a one or two-story house, but rather a skyscraper that just keeps going up!  
  
Third, strengthened in the faith as you were taught. We must be taught the Word of God in order to grow in our faith. That is why we emphasize our one to one Bible study so much. Since a disciple must always be learning, we should make sure that we are putting ourselves in an environment where we can study and be strengthened on a regular basis. As we study the Bible, it should produce inner joy. The more we understand grace, the more gratitude we will have. Someone says, “A thankless spirit betrays a life which is no longer focusing on the greatness of Christ.” If you don’t feel very thankful today, it is probably because you have taken your eyes off of Jesus and put them on your problems.

After exhorting believers to live in Christ, in verse 8 Paul condemns the heresy that was diverting them from Christ. “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.” Many false teachings seem to be dynamic, giving answers to life’s problems. Those who spread these teachings are eloquent and persuasive, like the author of “Secret; the law of attraction.” Many people seek their help, and they offer seemingly profound advice. But in actuality it is hollow and deceptive.

In the early 20th century, a poor European family saved for years to buy tickets to sail to America. Once at sea, they carefully rationed the cheese and bread they had brought for the journey. After 3 days, the boy complained to his father, “I hate cheese sandwiches. If I don’t eat anything else before we get to America, I’m going to die.” Giving the boy his last nickel, the father told him to go to the ship’s galley and buy an ice-cream cone. When the boy returned after a long time with a wide smile. His worried dad asked, “Where were you?” “In the galley, eating three ice cream cones and a steak dinner!” “All that for a nickel?” Oh no, the food is free. It comes with the ticket.” The apostle Paul warned his readers about false teachers who were offering them “bread and cheese” instead of steak. They relied on their own reasoning and their own self-effort instead of trusting in Christ who purchased their ticket to heaven. False teachers feed you a line in order to get you to follow them and their philosophy, instead of Christ and his word. We who have trusted Christ for salvation have been assured not only of safe passage to heaven but everything we need to live for him here and now. Christ has all we need. It comes with the “ticket.” You live the Christian life the same way you began--by trusting Christ.

Look at verses 9-10. “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.” The Colossians do not need any other source or authority for their understanding and spiritual life. Christ is not just another philosopher, He is God. In fact, “in him all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form.” Note the word “all.” The glorified Jesus, his whole glorious total essence, is God. He alone is God incarnate; and all, all possible deity, the whole universe of deity, is found in him. Christ is both fully God and truly man (1 John 4:1-6). He is the full essence of God and man. Christ is God’s revelation of himself and his will to man. If you don’t follow him, you will be following someone else and end up at some other destination than your walk with Him would take you. Who else, what else do you need? Why search for meaning anywhere else. Why search for direction in anyone or anywhere else? Apart from Christ is emptiness. Only in Christ can you have, can you find fullness in your life. As atheistic philosopher Jean Paul Sartre put it, “Life is an empty bubble on the sea of nothingness” (Eccl. 1:14-18). Apart from God in Christ, man and life are ultimately meaningless.

Verses 11-12 turn from the theological errors of the false teachers to their practical errors. Look at verse 11. “In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ.” The Christians in Colosse had no need to conform to Jewish rules and regulations, such as circumcision. Circumcision was only the outward demonstration that man was born sinful and needed cleansing. They had been circumcised when they surrendered to Christ. This spiritual “circumcision” was done by Christ, not by man. It was in fact a crucifixion or putting off of the body or sinful nature, a circumcision of the heart (Rom 2:29; Eph. 2:11). Something has changed inside of us. When we were baptized into Christ, our sinful past was removed, like dead flesh being cut from our body (verse 11), our hearts were filled with Christ (verse 10), and we have been forgiven of all our sins (verse 13), and we have been made alive in Jesus (verse 13). In other words, our old sinful heart has been taken out – it has been cut away - and replaced with a new Christ-centered heart. Because of that, now, we don’t do good things because of rules and regulations; we do good things because Christ dwells within us. We are not moral because we HAVE to be. We are moral because we WANT to be – because our heart now belongs to Jesus Christ.

Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, used to tell a story about a woman married to a tyrant. He didn’t like her cooking. He didn’t like the way she kept house. He didn’t like the way she did laundry. He didn’t like the way she ironed his clothes. He didn’t like the way she dressed. He constantly criticized her for everything. Early on in their marriage he handed her a list of 25 rules for her to follow. She hated it. She hated him. You can imagine how frustrating it was to her to have to constantly check her list to see if she was pleasing him – and to stay out of trouble. She usually failed and each time got a tongue lashing from him. He made her feel miserable and small. Then one day, much to her great joy, he died. She soon fell in love with and married a wonderful man. They loved each other very deeply. She practically broke her neck to please him. Sometimes she would even bring him breakfast in bed. One day she ran across that old list from her first husband. As she read it, feelings of anger and inferiority returned. Then she started laughing. As she checked the list she realized that she was now doing all that was on the list for her new husband and more. And she was doing all this with great joy because she loved this man so much.

Throughout the history of the church there have been “perfection police” who have inserted themselves as the rule and authority on how we are supposed to think, act and do; they determine what we can do and not do; where we can go and not go; what we can eat and not eat; how we should dress and not dress. In the last HBF camp, there was a debate about the length of the skirt a girl should wear at the camp. If we are in Christ, we will live Christ-centered lives, and all these rules will be unnecessary.

Paul mentions another false teaching in verse 18. “Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.” Mysticism is all about MY experiences and MY wisdom and MY inner power. This kind of pseudo-spiritualism exalts SELF, not CHRIST. In Paul’s day many people believed in angel worship and goddess worship. It is not all that different today. Many people seek signs and miracles to have supernatural experiences and brag about them.

Why are so many people led astray by false teachings? Look at verse 19. “He has 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.” Christians get led astray when they lose connection with Jesus Christ--who is the Head of the Church. Any churchgoer who is not connected to the Head of the Church will be easily fooled. Without connection to Christ, they will wander off into any false teachings that comes along. The other lesson here is that we need our connection with each other. Notice that Paul said the body is supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews. We need our connection with Christ, but we also need our connection with each other. Our connection with Christ gives us life. Our connection with each other gives us accountability and protection from false teachings. That is why it is important for all of us to meet together. We need to make time in our busy schedules for Bible study or small groups where we can connect with Christ and other believers. That is our best defense against the many false teachings that are all around us.

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.