

**“The Supreme Charge”**  
Colossians 2:6-7 (NRSV)

Apart from those intrepid souls who get up early in the morning to walk within the cozy confines of our local Seven Oaks Mall, or who venture out to walk the boardwalk and paved trail around Mill Lake on sunny days, or parts of the newly developed Abbotsford Discovery Trail, it seems that **walking has become “a lost art.”** Years ago, people used to walk almost everywhere they went. People used to walk for the fun of it, as much as for the health of it. Moreover, walking was a way of life.

This and much more is documented in a very interesting, complete treatment of the subject in Geoff Nicholson’s recent book, entitled The Lost Art of Walking: The History, Science, Philosophy, and Literature of Pedestrianism. Although such a formidable title might suggest a rather exhaustive read – pun intended -- putting you to sleep or motivating you to go out for a walk, the book is, instead, a delightful, leisurely ramble through the history of the lore of walking with particular reference to walks around London, England and Los Angeles, California. I recommend it. It’s good to think about what walking means and can do for the heart as well as the soul. And, of course, it’s good to actually do it.

Walking ... can take you to places you don’t expect to go, people you don’t expect to meet, [and] entanglements you hadn’t planned on. (A review by Jonathan Yardley, “A wander round the art of perambulation,” The Washington Post, reprinted in the Guardian.)

In this next section of his Letter to the Colossians, Paul writes about one aspect of walking, **walking with the Lord**. Walking is a particularly Christian thing to do. After all, many Christian pilgrims walked all over Europe in pilgrimages, a spiritually and physically healthy custom that is currently experiencing tremendous renewal. But our spiritual walk can also be called a walk.

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, **continue to live your lives [literally, in the original Greek, to walk] in him**, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving (Col. 2:6-7).

The only way to avoid being led astray by others is to **walk with Jesus**, to **walk on the path which he has walked**, and which he lays out before us. Paul was well aware that the Gnostics were offering a so-called “deeper knowledge” or “deeper walk” to the Colossians. He knew their tactics: they came as supposedly wiser, more mature Christians; they claimed “love” had compelled them to help “lift” the Colossians from their “baby-faith” up to the real thing. In Colossians 2:6 and following, Paul goes on the offense against these false teachers. In verses 6-7, by way of introduction, he seeks to ground them in the basics of **the Christian faith walk**.

### 1. **A real walk** (Col. 2:6).

“As you therefore have **received Christ Jesus the Lord**, continue to live your lives [or to walk] in him” (2:6a). This statement begs the question, **“When does our walk begin?”** When we **receive sufficient information** about where we might go for a walk. Where shall we go for our walk? Who will go with us? How interesting will the walk be? What will we see and do along the way? Then, we must **decide whether we want to go for a walk**. But not until we actually get up out of our beds, or up out of our chairs, and out of our houses, do we actually **begin the walk**.

“As you therefore have **received Christ Jesus the Lord...**” Many of us may well have been brought up in the faith. We received Christ Jesus from our parents. We began walking the Christian way before we really knew what we were doing. So we may say that there never was a day that we didn’t know the Lord’s love and kindness and mercy. Yet each one of us will have had to make that faith passed on to us more personal. For those of us who were baptized as infants, it may well have been at “confirmation” that this happened, or for those who were never baptized as children or young adults, it may have happened at some other time. In any case, if we are Christians today, we will have had to have **“received Christ Jesus” as Lord and Saviour** for ourselves.

I was brought up in the church. We went to church twice on a Sunday; we attended Sunday School and Youth Groups. We read the entire Bible, several times, beginning with Bible storybooks, most weekday evenings, after supper, at home. We had discussions about what was read. Nevertheless, I was conscious of making this faith my own in my early university years. It was there that I received adult answers for my young adult questions. It was then that I now say I “put my mind in gear” over the

gospel and made my parents' faith my own. I suppose I could say it was then that I **“received Christ Jesus the Lord”** in a more mature manner.

**Receiving Jesus Christ means more than simply “accepting him.”** It means having adequate knowledge about him. Paul implies here that the Colossians had received the teaching and traditions handed down about **“Christ Jesus, the Lord.”** They had a certain understanding of what they'd received. They had a certain understanding of who Jesus Christ was and is. They hadn't received him just as “Jesus” or just as “Christ,” but in all his fullness.

They received him as **“the Christ,”** the Anointed One, or the Messiah. They had received him as the One who fulfilled all the Messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures. He was their divine prophet, priest and king.

They also received him as **“Jesus,”** a historical person, rooted in time and space and humanity, through the Incarnation. “Jesus” is Greek for the Hebrew name **“Yehosua,”** which means “God is salvation.” So they received him as the captain of their salvation, the Saviour of their souls, and so rejected salvation in “any other name” (Acts 4:12).

And they received him as **“the Lord.”** The designation of Jesus as “the Lord” gathers up everything the disciples acknowledged about their Master while he was with them and everything that the early church proclaimed about him (Acts 2:36; Phil. 2:11). It is a dynamic, comprehensive title. In fact, the phrase, “Christ Jesus [as] Lord,” was on every early believer's lips, in deliberate opposition to the state-mandated lordship of Caesar. Preacher **Charles Spurgeon** comments on this, saying,

It is interesting that the Apostles preached the Lordship of Christ. The word “Saviour” occurs only twice in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 5:31, 13:23). On the other hand it is amazing to notice the title “Lord” is mentioned 92 times; “Lord Jesus” 13 times, and the Lord Jesus Christ” 6 times in the same book.

When the Colossians received him, they received him in full knowledge of this teaching, and they bowed before him as their Sovereign, their Lord! Paul's point is that the Colossians had **“received Christ Jesus [as] Lord”** and that they would remain safe from spiritual seduction if they continued to walk in him. They had a lot to talk about and a lot to learn.

**Good walks with others are full of good conversation.**

**2. A rooted and built up walk in him (Col. 2:6b-7a).**

But the walk also has to be **an active walk**. There's no use just thinking about walking. A true Christian has to **be on the move**. In case you think "receiving Christ Jesus" is all about the mind, **Billy Graham** helpfully adds this distinction,

No [one] can be truly converted to Christ who has not bent his [or her] will to Christ. He [or she] may give intellectual assent to the claims of Christ and may have had [some] emotional religious experiences; however, he [or she] is not truly converted until he [or she] has surrendered his [or her] will to Christ as Lord, Saviour and Master (The Annals of America, vol. 17, "1950-1960, Cold War in [a] Nuclear Age, 1968, p. 395)

It's a helpful distinction. **We are to walk in the reality of whatever knowledge of the "new birth" we have received**. Paul makes this a present, active imperative: "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives [or walk] in him, rooted and built up in him...." (2:6b).

**These roots** don't just make their way into the ground. They are at work. They are always on the move. You might say they walk. They are **"like trees walking"** (Mk. 8:24).

You only have to visualize the picture of the moveable forest of "Great Birnam wood" that came against Macbeth on "Dunsinane hill" in **Shakespeare's** tragedy of that same name, or the Ents and the trees they cared for, with Treebeard in particular, who assisted in the battle against the dark forces of Sauron the Great, self-styled ruler of Middle-earth, and declared Enemy of the Free Peoples, in **Tolkien's** Lord of the Rings trilogy, to see what Paul is talking about here.

There are truths and teachings that have taken root in our lives and they must be **active and alive**.

**Tumbleweeds** have single, rather shallow roots that turn brittle with age. Their limited root structure results in a short life, death and subjection to the will of the winds. **But trees** have large, deep roots. They endure. They are difficult to uproot.

The Colossians were **rooted in Christ**. Paul probably had the imagery of Psalm 1 in mind, picturing them as trees that had their roots “planted by streams of water” (Ps. 1:3a). They grew deep and wide into the soil of Christ, drawing nourishment and sustenance from his very life.

Believers are **“rooted and built up” in Christ**. There is an absolute dependence on the believer’s part. He is the vine and we are the branches; that’s how the fruit grows (Jn. 15:1-8). Further, the foundations of our lives are built upon him (cf. Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20; and 1 Pe. 2:6) so it is clear that the winds and the storms of life cannot overcome us or prevail (Matt. 7: 24-27).

Such a life **“rooted in”** and **“built upon”** Christ will not succumb to the sweet Gnosticizing of the false teachers. Centre down upon Christ. For it is out of that deep sense of rootedness “in him” that believers “can run and not be weary” and “walk and not faint” (Isa. 40:31b).

### 3. **A walk in faith** (Col. 2:7b).

Then there is this: the Colossians needed to be “... rooted and built up in him **and established in the faith**, just as you were taught, ...” (2:7b), “for,” as Paul writes elsewhere, “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). That doesn’t mean walking blindly, quite the contrary. The Colossians were to continue to be established in the faith which they had received and believed and which they had been taught from the very beginning.

Real Christian growth does not discard the most basic early truths that one has learned for some newer, so-called up-to-date truth. One does not sell one’s birthright for a mess of “pottage” as Esau did (Gen. 25:29). There will always be some people trying to sell you “a new and improved” Christianity, but it isn’t right and it doesn’t work.

To **outgrow the basic truths of the Christian faith** is to become post-Christian and pagan, despite all kinds of suggestions that this might be a good thing. To be sure, we live in a post-Christian age, but such basic doctrines as the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement, the

communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body defy exhaustive exposition. Over the years, such doctrines have been fruitfully studied and, if the Lord tarries, they can continue to be fruitfully studied for thousands of years to come.

Seeing the greatness of the essentials, we need to pray like the Scottish Presbyterian, **Samuel Rutherford**, for hearts and minds that are bigger, that they might hold more and more of Jesus Christ. I think **one of Paul's prayers** for the Ephesian church **applies**:

I pray that, ... Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power 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 so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:17-19).

As we love him, we learn more; as we learn more, we love him more. And we must live this love out, more and more, in our lives.

#### 4. **A thankful walk** (Col. 2:7c).

And, finally, there is this: **“abounding in thanksgiving”** (2:7c). A healthy Christian walk spills over with gratitude and praise. We are not talking about the mindless repetition of clichés. Two friends were walking through a field when suddenly an angry bull began chasing them. They headed for the fence as fast as they could move. “Say a prayer,” cried one to the other. “I don’t know any,” answered his companion, almost out of breath. “You’ve got to,” said his friend, “that bull is getting closer!” “Okay,” shouted the other, “I’ll pray the only one I know.” And as the horns came within striking range, he prayed, “O Lord, for what we are about to receive make us truly grateful!” That’s not the thankfulness and praise that Paul had in mind.

**Thankfulness is a good test of our spiritual state.** A thankless spirit betrays a life that is no longer focusing on the greatness of God and what he has accomplished in Christ. A thankless spirit often looks down, not up. Thankful hearts herald spiritual health.

I do not know what your walk may include, or what dangers and difficulties you may be facing along the way. But I trust that God and his goodness are

on your mind and in your heart and in your soul. I trust that there are good things for which you can thank God in spite of the sad things that may also be on the path that God has given you to walk. I trust the journey itself will be rewarding. I hope that you have some friends to walk with on your way.

The famous Oxford English professors, **C. S. Lewis** and **J. R. R. Tolkien**, often went for long walks together. It helped them to talk about the things they were learning about the world and about their writing. I'm sure it also helped them to talk about the troubles they faced. But, ultimately, there was always time to enjoy the wind and the weather, and the countryside, and, to be thankful, especially by Tolkien, for the trees. And there was always the welcome and the warmth of an English pub, a beer or a cup of tea, and a cozy inn for supper and a good bed to sleep in for the night.

The Gnostics, and other cults like them, will have very little success around thankful people who know to whom they belong and in what they believe. In fact, thankful people are fun to be with and they often draw others away from false teaching. They are good to walk with.

But the sad truth is this: there are enticing voices all around us and, as with the Gnostics, what they say sounds logical. Deception can be supported by intelligence, credentials, popularity, and even a touch of class. As even Paul had to warn:

For such ... are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. [But] their end will match their deeds (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

The Devil knows what he is doing. As Screwtape said to Wormwood: "Old error in new dress, is ever error nonetheless" (**C. S. Lewis**, The Screwtape Letters).

So memorize the verses we study. Keep them close to your heart. Understand that the dangers are real. And walk the walk that ensures the wisdom of the song that we shall now sing: "When we walk with the Lord in the light of his Word what a glory he sheds on our way ..."

Amen

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