

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

WALK AND WATCH OUT

COLOSSIANS 2:6–8

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to the book of Colossians. Our passage today is Colossians 2:6–8. Paul's argument in this section really goes down all the way to verse 15. But I can't squeeze all of that into one message, so I will stop at verse 8 and just focus on verses 6–8 today. Next week, I'll address verses 9–15.¹

And speaking of Colossians 2:6–8, Paul gives us two commands in this passage that we should take note of. These are the first commands (Greek imperatives) in the entire book. He says, first of all, “walk” in verse 6. And then he says, “See to it” in verse 8. In Greek these are the verbs περιπατέω (*peripateō*) and βλέπω (*blepō*) respectively. Walk and watch out. That's a great summary statement for the Christian life from conversion to the grave: Walk and watch out.

And to that you might say, “Walk how?” And also, “watch out for what?” Those two questions I hope to answer for you today.

Several years ago, when my son was younger, I tried to get him to read *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. So I did what any decent father would do in that situation—I bribed him. I told him, “If you read all three books in that trilogy, I'll buy you any LEGO set you want.” At the time, he was really into LEGOs and building LEGO sets.

And he did it. He read the whole thing. And it was fun because then we could talk about the books and talk about the movies and have these shared experiences.

But I do remember him saying this. When I asked him about the books, he said, “Well Dad, there's a lot of walking in the books.” And that's true. There is action and there is danger in the books, but there's also a lot of walking. Much of that trilogy involves the main characters walking and talking from point A to B to C to D, etcetera, etcetera.

And here's the parallel for the Christian life. Our following of Christ... Our movement to becoming mature in Christ Jesus... much of that involves taking simple steps every day. Are there adventures along the way? Sure. Are there ups and downs? Yes. Are there climactic points of overcoming challenges and difficulties? You bet. But the bulk of the Christian life involves step by step following Christ, every day, all the way to the finish line.

And I love the analogy of walking that Paul uses in the NT. Colossians 2 isn't the only place it shows up (see Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 5:7; Gal 5:16; Eph 4:1; 5:2, 8; Col 1:10; 2:6; 4:5; 1 Thess 4:1). I love that he uses this analogy, because many Christians view their Christian lives as simply an on/off switch. “I'm a Christian. I've been born again. I was lost, but now I'm found. The End.”

And there's some truth to that, of course. But being born again is just the beginning of a lifelong journey. Getting baptized is just the first step in a lifelong process of sanctification. We have received Christ Jesus the Lord. Yes! Hallelujah! But also we walk in him for five, ten, twenty, fifty, seventy years.

¹ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 149: “With 2:6–7, Paul moves into the main body of the letter as he focuses on the problems that appear in Colossae. The concerns expressed in the previous two sections are clearly alluded to in this brief section. The note on the reception of ‘Christ Jesus the Lord’ (v. 6) alludes to the christological confession of 1:15–20, and the call to remain firm in the faith as they “were taught” (2:7) points to the description in 2:1–5 of Paul's apostolic ministries. Paul then confronts directly the problems the Colossians are facing (2:8–23). He begins with the imperative ‘see to it’ (βλέπετε, v. 8), which draws attention to what Christ has already accomplished for those who belong to him (2:8–15).”

Here's your outline today. Very simply, we are encouraged in Colossians 2:6–8 to walk and watch out as believers. How do we walk? We walk in Christ.

Write this down as #1 in your notes.

What does a Christian do after Conversion?

1) We **Walk** in **Christ** (2:6–7)²

Paul says in verse 6,

⁶ Therefore,³ as you received⁴ Christ⁵ Jesus the Lord,⁶ so walk⁷ in him,⁸

Now there are a few assumptions built into this statement that we've got to address in order to make this "walking" effective. The first assumption is the "receiving." What does it mean to receive Christ Jesus as Lord? You can't walk *in him* if you haven't received *him*. **You can't advance the football down the field without the football.**⁹

What does it mean to receive Christ?¹⁰ Answer: "receiving Christ Jesus as Lord" here is shorthand for conversion.¹¹ To receive Christ Jesus the Lord is essentially receiving the gospel.¹² This is born-again language.

² Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 151: "The main thesis of this letter is laid out in a well-structured sentence in 2:6–7, in which Paul calls the Colossian believers to be faithful to the gospel they have received." Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, TNTC, 102: "These two verses sum up neatly the message of the entire letter."

³ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 154: "'Therefore' (οὖν) links this passage with the previous sections, which focused on the supreme status and identity of Christ (1:15–23) and the apostolic gospel that has been faithfully transmitted (1:24–2:5)."

⁴ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 92: "The Colossians have received Christ Jesus the Lord, they have settled convictions about His deity and sufficiency, and are standing firm against the attacks of false teachers, so they must continue to walk in Him."

⁵ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 155: "In light of the definite article before 'Christ' (τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν), 'Christ' should be taken as a title rather than as a personal name. The phrase therefore could be taken as 'the Messiah, Jesus, the Lord,' or even 'Jesus as Lord and Christ' (NJB). This formulation may be intended as a confession against the mystics who deny the lordship of the earthly Jesus."

⁶ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 140: "Since the basic sense of κύριος is that of superior to inferior (master to slave; king to subject; god to worshiper), with formally acknowledged rights of the former to command or dispose of the latter (see also 3:22 and 4:1), all would have recognized that acceptance of Christ Jesus as Lord included within it submission of the believer to this Christ and unconditional readiness to act in obedience to him."

⁷ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 140: "Ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε here, then, is equivalent to the πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε of Gal. 5:16... This combination of 'receiving tradition of Christ Jesus as Lord' and 'walking in him' is thus a neat summary of the mutual check and balance between outward guideline and inward motivation which was a feature of the Pauline ethic (as in Gal. 5:25–6:2)."

⁸ Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, TNTC, 104: "Literally, the word means 'walk', which, in Jewish thought (see on 1:10, above) was and is the standard term for ethical conduct. Here the emphasis is on the sort of conduct *appropriate* for one who claims Jesus as Lord. This, the ultimate goal of Paul's argument, will be spelt out (3:1–4:6) after he has warned against a road which turns out to be a blind alley."

⁹ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 92: "[W]alking in Christ means living in union with Him. It means to maintain a lifestyle patterned after His. 'The one who says he abides in Him,' the apostle John writes, 'ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked' (1 John 2:6)."

¹⁰ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 60: "They did not receive him just as Jesus or just as Christ, but in his fullness. They received him as the 'Christ,' the Anointed One or the Messiah. They received him as the One who fulfilled all the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. He was their Divine Prophet, Priest, and King."

¹¹ Both Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 177 and Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 155 suggest that this "receiving" is more specifically a reference to the apostolic teaching of Christ not salvation per se. Pao states, "Paul is not primarily referring to receiving Christ Jesus as one's personal Lord, but to the reception of the traditions concerning Christ Jesus the Lord." Not only does this create a false dichotomy, but it detaches the significance of the walking metaphor. How does one receive and walk with a tradition? It has to be internalized. How is it internalized? Through conversion/salvation.

Wright, 103 and others connect this "receiving" to the profession of faith that accompanied a new believer's baptism. While plausible, this seems (in this pastor's humble opinion) unlikely.

¹² Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 139: "Paul refers his readers back to their experience of hearing and receiving the gospel (aorist tense), as he had in responding to the equivalent situation in Galatia (Gal. 3:1–5). As in Galatians, this first decisive experience provides a norm and a starting point for what should follow: their ongoing life of faith should be in accord with the faith with which it began."

You have to be saved. You have to be born again. You can't walk in Christ if you haven't been redeemed by Christ.¹³

The famous statesman and religious leader from India, Mahatma Gandhi, was a great admirer of Jesus. He spoke repeatedly about following Christ's example and living like he did. But he totally rejected Christ's claim to be God. He said famously, "I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born."¹⁴ Gandhi tried to imitate Christ on his own terms. He wanted to believe and obey the Sermon on the Mount without believing and obeying the other statements in the NT about Jesus. But that doesn't work. You're throwing out the baby to save the bathwater in that scenario.

Another assumption here is the spiritual state of the Colossians. Paul assumes in this statement that the Colossians are believers. They are legit converts to Christ. So his warnings concerning false teachers and plausible arguments that delude (2:4) are warnings delivered from one believer to another. Even with all the unhealthy things that are taking place in the Colossian church and their flirting with false teaching, it's good to know that Paul still thinks that they are believers. They've received Christ.

And let's drill down on that a little further. Look again at the front side of **verse 6**.

⁶ *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord,*

The Lord! Feel the deliberateness of Paul's language here. **Doug Moo** has shown in his commentary that this is the only appearance of "Christ Jesus the Lord" in the NT with this particular combination of terms and definite articles.¹⁵ And you get the sense that Paul is intentionally elongating this reference so that every part of this statement is emphasized—Christ... Jesus... the... Lord.¹⁶ Not *just* Jesus. Not *just* Christ Jesus. But "Christ Jesus the Lord."¹⁷

"Yeah, I like Jesus. But I just don't think he's 'the Lord.'"

You don't get to say that.

"Yeah, I like Jesus. But I think the "Messiah talk" about him and the connections to the OT are overblown."

You don't get to say that. You don't get to *receive* him that way. And if you do, you aren't embracing Christian conversion. **You can be an admirer like Gandhi. But you can't be a Christian.**

The famous evangelist **Billy Graham** said the following... Who led more people to Christ than Billy Graham in the last century? Who's been more impactful for Christ on the mission field? And yet **Graham** would say, **"No man can be said to be truly converted to Christ who has not bent his will to Christ. He may give intellectual assent to the claims of Christ and may have had emotional religious experiences; however, he is not truly converted until he has surrendered his will to Christ as Lord, Savior and Master."**¹⁸

And that understanding of Christ Jesus as Lord goes right to the imperative at the back half of the verse.

⁶ *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,*

"You received him as 'the Lord.' Walk in him as 'the Lord.'" He's not your buddy. He's not your copilot. He's not your homeboy. He's not the Tonto to your Lone Ranger. People who talk like that don't

¹³ Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."

¹⁴ E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1925), 114.

¹⁵ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 178n8.

¹⁶ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 139–40: "This way of speaking of Jesus goes back to the earliest days of Christianity. It reflects the impact of the resurrection of Jesus on the beginnings of christology proper (Acts 2:36; Phil. 2:11), the significance of Ps. 110:1 as one of the main Old Testament texts to shape the earliest faith (see on 3:1), and the importance of the title in earliest Christian devotion (such that it was preserved in an Aramaic formulation in Greek-speaking churches [1 Cor. 16:22])... Receiving (the proclamation of) Christ Jesus as Lord was thus one of the most effective summaries of the gospel as it had been understood from the beginning and had been preached particularly in the Pauline mission."

¹⁷ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 60: "'Lord' gathers up all that Paul had previously said about Christ in Colossians. It is a dynamic, comprehensive title. When the Colossians received him, they received him in full knowledge of this teaching, and they bowed before him as their Sovereign, their Lord!"

¹⁸ Quoted in Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 60–1.

understand Christology as Paul presents it in the book of **Colossians**. **Go read that Christ-hymn again if you have to. Read it again and again and purge that ridiculous “Jesus is my homeboy” thinking of yours if you have to.**

Once we have the right view of him, then we can get our walk on. Then we understand what it means to walk in the power that he gives. Then we understand how comprehensive and essential he really is to everything—our justification, our sanctification (our walk), and our future glorification.

Now, write this down as a, b, c, and d in your notes. Paul gives us some imagery and some instructions for what our “walk” in Christ Jesus looks like.¹⁹ Here’s letter a.

a) We **sink** our roots into him

⁶ *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷rooted²⁰*

How do you walk when you are rooted? Paul is mixing metaphors here. Don’t worry about it. He can get away with that. He’s an apostle!²¹

What does Paul mean by “rooted?” He means you sink your roots deep into Christ Jesus. Your identity is derived from him. Your strength is drawn from him. Like a big, immovable oak tree that has a

¹⁹ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 156: “This list (a series of participles) resembles the list that appears earlier in reference to the means through which one can walk in a manner that pleases God:

1:10b–12a

2:7

bearing fruit in every good work

rooted [in him]

growing in the knowledge of God

built up in him

being strengthened with all power ...

established in the faith ...

giving thanks to the Father ...

abounding in thanksgiving

Both lists begin with a horticultural metaphor, and both end with a note on thanksgiving. In light of an intervening section that focuses on the supremacy of Christ (1:15–20), this second list makes it more explicit that the believers are now to be grounded ‘in him.’”

²⁰ Paul uses four participles in verse 7 to expound upon his “walk in him” command. Three of the participles are present tense, but “rooted” is perfect tense. This is reflected in some of the English versions and Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 181 comments as follows: “We have deliberately used the language of ‘remaining’ with respect to ‘rooted’ and ‘continuing’ with respect to ‘built up’ to reflect the probable distinction that Paul intends by putting the former into the perfect tense and the latter into the present tense; see NASB: ‘having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him.’”

In light of this grammatical analysis, can it be said that we truly “sink our roots” into Christ? Is this a divine passive? Or would it be more appropriate applicationally to simply state that we constantly “acknowledge our rootedness” in Christ as we walk? Either way, there is an expectation for the Christian to stay rooted to Christ in the midst of one’s walk. There is activity not passivity here one way or another for the Christian. If we interpret this passage through the lens of Psalm 1:1–3 and Jeremiah 17:7–8, it is perfectly reasonable to appropriate a “sink your roots into Christ” application. But one must not lose sight of the passive nature of this participial verb. This is God working in and through us (see Col 1:29). The same consideration must be given for the following two participial verbs which are also passive: “built up” and “established.”

²¹ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 62: “We are to dig deep into the soil of Christ, there plant our lives, and spend our remaining days becoming a building worthy of the foundation.”

vast root system deep underground... you are tapped into the soil of strength and sustenance that is Christ Jesus. And those roots go deeper and deeper as you age in Christ.²²

Probably Paul has **Psalms 1:1–3** in mind here: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

Probably Paul also has **Jeremiah 17:7–8** in mind: “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

You might say to this, **“I want to be that tree, Pastor Tony! How do I sink my roots into Christ Jesus?”** Listen, it’s not fancy. I don’t have some profound, paradigm-altering answer for you. **The answer is you read your Bible. You go to church. You pray like crazy. You actually trust Christ when life is hard.**²³ **And over time your sapling soul becomes a Christ-nourished immovable oak!**²⁴

Here’s a second image. Here’s letter b.

b) We are **built** up in him

⁶ *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him*

More Pauline mixing of metaphors.²⁵ Paul moves from horticulture to architecture.²⁶ Don’t worry about it; it’s what Paul does.

The verb “built up” obviously has a connection to the world of home-building. So you are trading an agricultural image here for the language of building or even carpentry. And without torturing the metaphor, I would just point out that our being rooted in Christ goes *inward*. But our being built up in him goes *outward*.

And I would just encourage you to consider that everything that looks good in your metaphorical house came from Christ. He built you. And your gifts and talents and abilities as a Christian and as an influencer are a result of him. To the extent that you want to grow that and increase that, it’s completely dependent on him. He’s the one that builds you up.²⁷

To the extent that we can appropriate this statement as a command to build on Christ, let me remind you about Jesus’s parable of the person who builds his house upon the rock versus the one who builds on sand (**Matt 7:24–27**). I’ve seen lots of Christians and Christian influencers who build their houses on the sand of their own talents, gifts, abilities, and personality. That’s a mistake.

Here’s a third statement. Here’s letter c.

c) We **stand** firm in the faith

Paul says in **verse 7**,

²² JOHN CALVIN: “For as a tree that has struck its roots deep has a sufficiency of support for withstanding all the assaults of winds and storms, so also, if anyone is deeply and thoroughly fixed in Christ, as in a firm root, it will not be possible for them to be thrown down from their proper position by any trickery of Satan. On the other hand, if anyone has not fixed their roots in Christ, they will easily be carried about by every wind of doctrine, just as a tree that is not supported by any root.” Quoted in Graybill, *Philippians, Colossians: New Testament*. RCS, 174.

²³ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 63: “We are not arguing for some sort of cliché-ridden Christianity, but for a profound head-and-heart study of God’s Word, with an eye on the magnificent essentials.”

²⁴ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 156: “Paul makes it clear that ‘to walk’ should not be defined simply in pragmatic and behavioral terms, for it involves both living in faith and in the worship of the true Lord of all.”

²⁵ Paul does this also in 1 Corinthians 3:9, “For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.”

²⁶ Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, TNTC, 104: “How many of these metaphors were still ‘live’ for Paul it is hard to say. Even he must have had difficulty imagining Christians ‘walking’ in Christ by being well rooted like a tree, solidly built like a house, confirmed and settled like a legal document, and overflowing like a jug full of wine.”

²⁷ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 93: “By studying the ‘word of His grace, which is able to build you up’ (Acts 20:32), believers will ‘grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’ (2 Pet. 3:18).”

⁷rooted and built up in him and established²⁸ in the faith,²⁹

Not “faith.” Not stand firm *in faith*. But stand firm “*in the faith*.”³⁰ This is the way that Jude uses this word in **Jude 3**, “I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for *the faith* that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

This statement is objective not subjective. Paul’s statement about “the faith” is a reference to all of the truths and traditions concerning Christ that Paul and the other apostles passed down to the church. This is not a hyper-individualized reality. This is not “my truth” and “my faith.” It’s “the faith.” We are established in something objectively true, not just subjectively believed.

And here’s a fourth statement... a fourth outworking of our walking in Christ. And the fourth one is the most surprising.³¹

d) We **abound** with thanksgiving

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

We abound with thanksgiving as we walk in Christ. This is an essential part of our walk. We overflow with gratitude.

Listen, there is nothing more oxymoronic than an ungrateful Christian.³² How can you possibly be both *saved eternally from your sins* and also *ungrateful*? Those sins would have sent you to hell apart from Christ! How can you possibly be both *saved* by Christ and also *ungrateful*? That’s not just oxymoronic... that’s moronic!³³

The story is told about two men who were walking together in a field. And suddenly an angry bull started chasing them. They headed for the fence as fast as they could. And the one man said to the other, “Say a prayer for us.”

But the other man said, “I don’t know any prayers.”

“You’ve got to pray for us,” said the first man. “The bull is getting closer.”

“Okay, I’ll pray the only one I know.”

So the man prayed, “For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly grateful!”³⁴

Now, that is the ridiculous prayer of someone who doesn’t know God. But for those of us who do know God and have experienced his saving grace, we can literally (as Paul says elsewhere), “Give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess 5:18; cf. Eph 5:20; Heb 13:15). Why? Because nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:38–39).

²⁸ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 142: “The third metaphor is drawn from the marketplace. Βέβαιος and βεβαιόω were commonly used to denote the formal or legal guarantee required in the transfer of property or goods.”

²⁹ Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, TNTC, 104: “It is grammatically uncertain whether, by ‘strengthened in the faith’, Paul means that their faith should itself become stronger, or that they should become stronger (in other respects) *by means of* their faith, or that they should become stronger in their grasp of ‘the faith’, i.e. Christianity as a whole. Paul could have said any of these: the immediate reference to the teaching they had received indicates that the last is probably correct.”

³⁰ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 158: “This dative phrase should therefore be understood in the locative sense (‘in the faith’), not an instrumental sense (‘by your faith’).”

³¹ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 151: “These four participles are not to be understood in strictly parallel terms, however. While the first three clearly describe various components of walking in Christ, the active participle at the end is separated from the first three by an intervening comparative clause (‘just as you were taught’) and summarizes the previous three passive participles. To abound in thanksgiving is the goal of being ‘rooted’ and ‘built up’ in him and ‘established in the faith’ (cf. a similar thanksgiving function in 3:17).”

³² Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 63: “Thankfulness is a good test of our spiritual state. A thankless spirit betrays a life which is no longer focusing on the greatness of Christ.”

³³ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 147: “A characteristic and fundamental feature of their relation with Jesus as Christ and Lord should be gratitude for what God has done in and through him. As rootedness and foundation depends on the faith called forth by the gospel, so growing from the root and building up on the foundation can be successful only in an atmosphere of thankfulness to God.”

³⁴ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 63.

And Paul doesn't just say, "**Be a little thankful**" here in **Colossians 2**. He doesn't say, "**Be mostly thankful.**" What does he say at the end of **verse 7**? ... "Abounding in thanksgiving."³⁵

You should fall all over yourself every day. "Thank you, thank you, thank you, Lord, for saving my wretched soul." We should show up here on Sunday morning with smiles on our faces ready to sing and praise. The worship leaders should never have to say, "Come on now! Give me some more passion for this, church." Never!

It doesn't matter how hard a week you've had. It doesn't matter what health crisis you're going through. It doesn't matter if your dog died, you lost your job, and you sprained your ankle all in the same week. You should still be abounding in thanksgiving, because Jesus Christ saved your soul when you didn't deserve it and when the alternative was separation from God for eternity.

Now, is there a time to lament? Yes. Do I want you to fake it at church if you're going through something horrible? No. But most of the laments in the OT end in praise (e.g., **Pss 3; 4; 6; 13; 27; 54; 56; 57; 61; 142**). Most of them are a means to an end... and the end is deeper trust in the Lord and praising his name.

And by the way, speaking of "abounding in thanksgiving." This is a sneaky prominent theme in the book of **Colossians** if you haven't noticed that already. Let me show you something really quick.

Look at **Colossians 1:3**, "We always thank God..." Look at **Colossians 1:12**, "giving thanks to the Father..." Then we have this statement in **Colossians 2:7**, "abounding in thanksgiving."

Look also at **Colossians 3:15**, "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful." And then the next verse in **3:16**, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." And the next verse in **3:17**, "giving thanks to God the Father through him." And then **Colossians 4:2**, "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving."

Most of those verses are using the Greek word εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*) or some cognate of that term.³⁶ And that term is derived from the word for grace—χάρις (*charis*). What are we thankful for, no matter what? What do we praise God for no matter what takes place in your life? God's grace! God's χάρις.

And Paul is telling us here that this is instrumental in our walk with Christ. As you walk *with* Christ... as you walk *in* Christ... let your thankfulness for his grace be abounding. **Don't let Satan get a hold of your heart and darken it towards the Lord. Don't let Satan deceive you into thinking that something bad in your life is proof that God doesn't love you. You want proof that God loves you? Here it is... grace!**

And speaking of Satan, write this down as a second point in your notes. What does a Christian do after conversion? We walk in Christ. Also...

2) We **Watch** Out for **Counterfeits** (2:8)

Paul says in **verse 8**,

³⁵ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 182–3: "The allusion to what the Colossians have already been taught interrupts the flow of participles, causing *overflowing with thankfulness* to stand by itself as almost an afterthought. But we should not thereby underestimate its significance. As we have noticed already, thanksgiving plays a prominent role in Colossians, Paul apparently being convinced that true gratitude for God's grace is an important 'offensive' measure against the false teaching."

³⁶ Colossians 3:16 is actually the word χάρις and is translated here "thankfulness."

⁸See to it that no one³⁷ takes you captive³⁸ by philosophy and empty deceit,³⁹ according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.⁴⁰

There is Christ and there is nothing else. Any addition to him is subtraction. Any deviation from him is deleterious to your Christian walk.⁴¹ **“Discernment in the Christian life isn’t knowing the difference between right and wrong. It’s knowing the difference between right and almost right.”**

Several years ago, Sanja and I had a house in Illinois that had a basement office downstairs. And the stairway leading down there was pretty rough. So, my wife decided to refurbish it. And she put down these beautiful cherry-wood steps that looked amazing. Sanja is a bit of a carpenter if you didn’t know that already.

And after she fixed this stairway, she put this finishing lacquer on them that made them shine and look amazing. But it also made them incredibly slippery. And she told me, “Watch out when you go down this stairway. I need to sand and refinish it a few times because they are slippery.” And I said, “Yeah, yeah. I got it. I’m an athlete! Don’t worry about me.”

Well, the next morning, I got up early. I had my backpack on with my computer. I had a big cup of coffee in my hand with one of my favorite coffee mugs. And I had my slippery socks on. And I started down towards my office to start my day. And Sanja was still asleep.

And I don’t think my socks ever fully landed on the first step. My feet immediately slid out in front of me. My coffee went flying. I screamed bloody murder all the way down. And by the time everything was over, Sanja came in terrified that she had just killed her husband.

Thankfully the only thing that was broken was my coffee mug and my pride. The rest of me was okay. And Sanja could have said in that moment, “I told you to watch out!” But she’s a good wife. She knew she didn’t have to say it.

And there’s this little tendency in the human heart, when I say, “Watch out for Christian counterfeits!” for people to say, “Yeah, yeah. I got this, Pastor Tony.” And they are unaware of the danger.

Because I’ve seen it. I’ve seen good Christian men and women get sucked into the vortex of bad theology, bad Christology, and ... how does Paul put it here?

... philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition,⁴² according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

³⁷ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 158: “The construction used here—‘see to it that no one’ (βλέπετε μή)—appears several times in Paul’s letters as readers are warned to take note of the danger they are facing (1 Cor 8:9; 10:12; Gal 5:15; cf. Eph 5:15).”

³⁸ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 99: “Takes you captive is from *sulagōgeō*, a rare word used only here in the New Testament and not at all found in extrabiblical Greek until long after Paul’s time. *Sulagōgeō* is a compound word, made up of *sulē*, ‘booty,’ and *agō*, ‘to carry off.’ It literally means ‘to kidnap,’ or ‘to carry off as booty, or spoil of war.’ ... Surely it grieves the heart of any pastor to learn of spiritual children who by immaturity are susceptible to the danger of false teaching and fall prey to a cult. Yet many have been duped into thinking they have found some truth, which in reality is a lie that has made them a captive to false teaching. One of the primary duties of church leaders is to guard the flock against wolves and perverse men (Acts 20:28–32) who assault flock members in an effort to kidnap them.”

³⁹ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 159: “The description ‘empty and deceitful’ sets up a contrast with Christ—‘in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell’ (1:19) and ‘in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden’ (2:3)—and with the gospel that is ‘the word of truth’ (1:5).”

⁴⁰ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 97: “The specific heresy threatening the Colossians is unknown, in that Paul does not name it. We can, however, reconstruct some of its tenets from 2:8–23. It contained elements of philosophy (2:8–15), legalism (2:16–17), mysticism (2:18–19), and asceticism (2:20–23).”

⁴¹ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 70–1: “Those trying to lead the Colossians astray were not ‘bad people’ in respect to conventional morals. They may even have exceeded many of the Christians in their lifestyle. Moreover, they were sincere. Their sophisticated language, their stringent rationality within the system, and their self-conscious morality made a huge, religious Venus Fly Trap. These are the hallmarks of the great cults today: seductive, deadly deceit, and as vacuous as a hot air balloon.”

⁴² Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 159–60: “‘According to human traditions’ recalls Jesus’ criticism of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law in Mark 7:8 (‘You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions’), a verse that immediately follows a quote from Isa 29:13, where God’s people are accused of false worship.”

Does this ever happen in the Christian world? Unfortunately, yes. **R. Kent Hughes** says as follows, “Apostasy can come to those who appear to be the best of Christians. I have even seen colleagues in the ministry fall to the lure of what they considered ‘deeper things.’ I remember one in particular who would no longer discuss the meaning of Scripture with me or others because he had a ‘higher hermeneutic,’ by which he meant that because he meditated on Scripture so much, he could see truths that transcended grammatical and traditional theological interpretation. With self-proclaimed ‘superior knowledge,’ he fathered a terrible legalism and led many into a false cult.”⁴³

I had this really good friend in college who at one time was a trusted godly source of wisdom. But then he started doing these Jedi mind tricks with me. He would say, “What God really wants you to do is this, Tony.” And “What God is really telling you is this!”

And over time it became less and less about God and his revealed Word. And it became more and more about what God was telling him to tell me that I couldn’t discern for myself. And I’m far enough removed from that situation now to know that what he was advocating was a “philosophy and empty deceit” that didn’t accord with Christ.

And by the way, “philosophy” isn’t the enemy here.⁴⁴ Philosophy simply means “love of wisdom.”⁴⁵ And philosophy was a general enough word to describe lots of things in the ancient world. Judaism and its different sects were each described as a “philosophy.”⁴⁶ Christianity was even described as a “philosophy.”⁴⁷

What Paul warns about here is a philosophy characterized by empty deceit.⁴⁸ It’s derived from human tradition and legalism, not God’s grace.⁴⁹ It’s dependent on the “elemental spirits of the world,” not Christ.

And that prompts the question—what in the world are the elemental spirits of the world?⁵⁰ There’s no Greek word here for “spirit” or “spirits” (πνεῦμα [*pneuma*]), so this is interpretive by the ESV. The Greek simply says, “elements of the world” or “substances of the world.”

Is this **(1)** a reference to demonic powers? Or is this **(2)** a reference to the elemental substances of the physical world—earth, wind, water, and fire? Or is this **(3)** a reference to elemental principles of the world that aren’t derived from Christ? Those are the three options for interpretation here.⁵¹

I’ve gone back and forth on this one. But I think it’s the first of those options. I think we are dealing with spiritual forces that are stirring up deceit in the church, and Paul is warning against them. In other words, let me

⁴³ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 58–60.

⁴⁴ Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, Col 2:8: “Paul uses philosophical language in his letters (including this one), but his source of knowledge is God’s revelation in Christ (2:2–3, 6), not the finite human reasonings of philosophers (2:4).” Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 185: “Paul has no intention of criticizing ‘philosophy’ as such, but only the kind of philosophy being propagated by the Colossian false teachers.” For a defense of philosophy as a course of study and other “worldly” disciplines which we might categorize as common grace items or even common wisdom, see Philipp Melancthon’s comments in Graybill, *Philippians, Colossians: New Testament*. RCS, 176–9.

⁴⁵ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 68: “We must first understand that Paul was not putting down philosophy. *Philosophy* simply means ‘love of wisdom.’ Everything that had to do with theories about God, the world, and the meaning of human life was called philosophy, both in the pagan and Jewish schools of the day. Both Judaism and Christianity are philosophical because they make holistic claims about the nature of reality and set values to guide life.”

⁴⁶ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 100: “The first-century Jewish historian Josephus wrote, ‘There are three philosophical sects among the Jews. The followers of the first of whom are the Pharisees, of the second the Sadducees, and the third sect who pretends to be a severer discipline are called Essenes’ (*Jewish Wars* 2.8.2). Thus, the term *philosophy* was broad enough to encompass religious sects. The use of the definite article with *philosophia* shows that Paul was referring here to the specific beliefs of the Colossian errorists.”

⁴⁷ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 147: “Justin Martyr presented Christianity as ‘the true philosophy.’”

⁴⁸ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 159: “This phrase literally reads ‘through philosophy and empty deception’ (NASB, NKJV, NRSV, ESV; cf. KJV, ASV), but the conjunction ‘and’ most likely carries an epexegetical function, with ‘empty deceit’ describing ‘philosophy’—thus, ‘hollow and deceptive philosophy’ (TNIV, NIV; cf. REB).”

⁴⁹ CHRYSOSTOM: “Then because the term *philosophy* has an appearance of dignity, Paul added, ‘And vain deceit.’” Quoted in Gorday, ed. *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*. ACCS, 29.

⁵⁰ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 187: “The meaning of the phrase that Paul uses here, *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* (‘the elements of the world’), is one of the more intractable problems in New Testament interpretation.”

⁵¹ For more on these three options, see Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 160 and Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 187–93.

describe it this way—These are demonically-induced human traditions that deceive and direct people away from the sufficiency of Christ.

Paul is saying, **“Don’t fall prey to the philosophy of these ascetics ... Those guys saying, ‘Don’t touch that... Don’t handle this... Don’t eat that.’”** Those human traditions that *aren’t* attached to Christ are empty deceptions!⁵² Those human traditions are antithetical to our commitment to Christ and Christ alone.

⁸See 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.

Now let me close with this. In the first century world, in AD 9 or thereabouts, there was a Roman General named Publius Quinctilius Varus. And Varus was leading a campaign far from Rome in the area known as Germania, east of the Rhine River. And Varus had three legions of soldiers at his command, something like 15,000 men.

And among his most trusted advisers was a Germanic commander in his ranks named Arminius. And Arminius was the last person that Varus ever suspected as a traitor. He appeared loyal. He served in the Roman military for years. He had received his Roman citizenship. But Arminius was lying in wait for a time to betray the great general.

And eventually, he got his chance. While these three legions of soldiers were traipsing through a dangerous stretch of Germania, Arminius convinced Varus to detour off the main roads and take a shortcut through the dense German forest. It was a trap. While in that forest, the native Germanics (who were used to fighting in the forest) attacked and annihilated three legions of Roman soldiers—15,000 men.

The military defeat was so devastating for Rome, that the Roman Emperor, Augustus, reportedly cried: “Quinctilius Varus, give me back my legions!” And the Roman Empire never fully recovered its ambitions east of the Rhine River.

Now, let’s talk about this. These soldiers were well trained. They were well armed. They were skilled. They were experienced. And the General was experienced. But they made two fatal mistakes. (1) They left the safety of the established roads and made themselves vulnerable in the woods. And (2) they got duped.⁵³ They got played by someone who pretended to be one of them, but was secretly working for the enemy to accomplish their demise.⁵⁴

In your Christian life, we’ve got to walk the walk in Christ. Don’t ever, ever drift away from him, Christian. Don’t add to him. Don’t take away from him. He’s everything to you. For more on how awesome and essential Christ Jesus is to our everything, come back next week. And we’ll look at a kind of Christ-hymn 2.0 in Colossians 2:9–15.

Secondly, we walk in Christ, and we watch out for charlatans. Don’t get duped by false teachers who tell you, “There’s a better way.”

Or “You are missing something that I have to offer you.”

Or “Christianity is okay, but it needs an additive.”⁵⁵

⁵² Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, TNTC, 106: “This is not to deny that there is a proper use of ‘tradition’ within Christianity, when Christ himself works by his Spirit to bring his truth to a new generation through the witness of the church.”

⁵³ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 68: “Over my years of ministry, I have seen those who were once perfectly healthy Christians set their sight on and their faith in something which was absolutely nothing! I have seen vibrant Christian young women don floor-length dresses and wear bonnets, all because a ‘leader’ said this was the path to true godliness. I have seen intelligent, college-age men refuse to wear shirts or trousers made of mixed fibers because the Old Testament forbade Israelites to wear clothing that was part wool and part linen (Deuteronomy 22:11). Eventually some of these were led off into a cult. It is amazingly easy for intelligent people to rest their lives on what will ultimately prove to be nothing.”

⁵⁴ Paul says about a similar contingent of charlatans the following in 2 Corinthians 11:13–15, “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.”

⁵⁵ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 193: “The teachers themselves are probably not denying that Christ was central to God’s saving purposes. They seem rather to be arguing that certain practices must be added on in order to achieve true

Or “Christ is *mostly* sufficient, but you need to embrace asceticism, gnosticism, mysticism, legalism, empiricism, rationalism,⁵⁶ or some other kind of -ism.”

No, Christian! Christ is enough! Walk and watch out. Walk and watch out. Let’s pray.

spiritual fulfillment. But, for Paul, in this case, addition means subtraction: one cannot ‘add’ to Christ without, in effect, subtracting from his exclusive place in creation and in salvation history.”

⁵⁶ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 96: “He wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:9 that ultimate truth is discoverable neither by empiricism nor by rationalism: ‘Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard [empiricism], and which have not entered the heart of man [rationalism], all that God has prepared for those who love Him.’”