

# Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

## **Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians**

### **Colossians 2:6-7**

#### **Living a Christ-Centered Life (Part 2)**

*6 Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.*

Last we began to look at these two verses in Colossians 2 noting that these serve as a great transition in the book; a transition from looking at what we might call the theology of Jesus Christ; the study and examination of who Jesus is; what He is like and what He has done; to the theology of Christian living; the study of how we should live in light of who Jesus is and what He has done.

As we were reminded last week, the apostle has gone to great lengths to paint the picture of the absolute supremacy of Christ as the Sovereign God as well as the astounding sufficiency of Christ as our sole Savior. There is none who compares to Him; none who can add to Him and indeed none who can replace Him. This is the way in which the Colossians believers first came to “receive” Christ Jesus the Lord. They were taught and came to embrace Him as the totally sovereign and sufficient Savior. And may I boldly say that our presentation of Jesus today is incomplete if we do not introduce individuals to as much of the person of Christ as possible. The gospel includes the truths that Jesus is our Redeemer (1:14); that He is the basis of our forgiveness of sins (1:14); that He is the image of the invisible God; the Creator of all things (1:15); the Sustainer of all things (1:17); the Head of the body, the church; the firstborn of from the dead; the Primary focus of our attention (1:18). Jesus is the fullness of God in the flesh (1:19); the Reconciler of alienated, hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds sinners to God (1:20-21); He is our Substitute, the propitiation of our sins (1:22). Jesus is our hope (1:24); and Jesus is the Subject of our preaching and teaching (1:25). Jesus is the mystery of God, which is Christ in us, the hope of glory (1:27). And Jesus is the one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3). He is absolutely supreme; absolutely sufficient.

This is the Jesus that the Colossians had received. Is this the Jesus that you have received; that you have taken hold of; that you have embraced? Is this the Jesus that you know and are coming to know better and better through the means of grace; that is through the reading of God’s Word; through intimate prayer; through fellowship in the Word with the saints?

This is the backdrop with which we began to consider the first point of what we are calling “living a Christ-centered life” – trying to answer the question, “How do we live a Christ-centered life?” If we are to keep Christ as our primary focus in life, then we must first “receive” these truths about Him. And so, Paul begins with the Colossians saying, “**Therefore**” – in light of all that we have learned and know about Jesus – “**as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord**” – that is, with the same full conviction and joy and enthusiasm in which you first came realize Jesus as your supreme and sufficient Savior; in which you have come to know and embrace Jesus – now; and here is the command to believers; here is the first true imperative to which believers are called to heed. If you have so received Christ alone in His preeminence as God in the flesh and as the Redeemer of your soul; then, by all means, without hesitation; without degradation; without stipulation; “**so walk in Him.**”

# Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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## II. We must respond to the call (2:6b)

...so walk in Him...

And so, the first step of living the Christ-centered life begins as we receive Christ Jesus the Lord as we have described above. But the second step of living the Christ-centered life then is responding to the call; that call being **“so walk in Him”** – so live your life in His life; according to His ways; in a manner consistent with His life. I love this command because it moves us from a mere intellectual pursuit of Jesus into an active pursuit of obedience of Jesus. We must be wary of being merely *“intellectual”* Christians, people who only know Christ with their heads; and pursue a course of also being *“active”* Christians, people who live and breathe and ooze Christ in all that we do. The more we come to know about Christ, the more our lives should be lived in Christlikeness. And then as we walk in Him, it becomes our desire that all might know Christ like this and so walk in Him. As Matthew Henry noted, “Those that are so full of Christ...are ready to think that others should be so too.” This is what we are getting at when we read, **“Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him...”**

If you have not already come to know this, true Christian living is not passive and our text clearly calls us out; reminding us that Christianity is not a spectator sport. You cannot live the Christian life merely on the prayers of others, you must also pray. You cannot rightly grow in the knowledge of Christ merely by hearing the thoughts of others who have studied, you must also study to show yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). Paul encapsulates this saying, **“so walk in Him.”** What does this mean, “to walk in Him?” Let’s flesh this out.

In a word, I would say to you that to “walk” in Jesus means to make progress in your spiritual life. Just as you rarely, if ever, walk to simply stay in one place but rather to get somewhere, we must recognize that we have been called to get somewhere in Jesus.

The Greek word for “walk” in our text means to tread around, to take a long walk; to cover a lot of ground; and there is a particular emphasis of proving that you can do so. In figurative language as used here, it speaks of the manner or means by which we live our lives in and for Christ. We are called here to walk, to conduct our lives “in Him” – that is “in the realm or in the sphere of Jesus.” Our behavior is to mimic the behavior of Jesus. When we speak of one’s “walk” in life, we are encompassing the whole of that person from his morals, to his ethics, to his social interactions, to his thoughts and of course to His spiritual behavior. And therefore, the way in which we relate to others, the way in which we respond to things that happen to us, the way in which we make decisions, how we spend our time; who we spend our money; all of these things constitute our “walk.” How are you walking? The Christ-centered life actively seeks to walk “in Him.” What is the opposite of walking in Christ? Is it not walking “in self” for self, by self; making your own decisions, avoiding the Word of God, prayerlessness, a life that neglects or minimizes the necessity of fellowship and anything else God has commanded we be deeply involved in?

According to our text, there is no question as to how the believer is to walk or how he is to live. Everything in the believer’s life is to relate back to the Lord Jesus Christ. Is He supreme and does He have first place in everything in your life – so walk in Him. Is He sufficient and do you find satisfaction in your salvation and in the current circumstances in which He has placed you for His purposes – so walk in Him.

Notice that this command is in the present tense; in the past, at some point in time, we have received Christ along with the realization of His supremacy and sufficiency. In light of that,

## Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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let us now, at this moment, currently and continually walk in Him. We could rightly translate this, “so be continually walking in Him.” This is the Christ-centered life, to be walking in Him, to be making progress toward Him to be doing everything we can to be closer and closer to Him and therefore become more and more like Him. Consider for a moment some of the other New Testament commands “to walk.” We are told to “walk in the Spirit” (Romans 8:4ff; Galatians 5:16, 25); to “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7); to “walk in love” (Ephesians 5:2); and to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” (Colossians 1:10). What to all of these imply? All of these imply action and effort. All of these imply progress, a personal resolve to move ahead in these things. It is to live out the resolve of Paul who said in Philippians 3:13-14;

***13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it [the fullness of knowing Christ] yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.***

Beloved, you must be determined and intentional about growing in Christ. And while it may seem to be that I am preaching to the choir, I believe that even we who are in choir need to be reminded that spiritual progress happens only as we submit ourselves to the Lord and pursue those things God has said result in spiritual maturity. This does not happen in front of the TV, or surfing the net. It happens as you immerse yourself into Jesus, into His Word, into those things that God has sanctioned as being delightful and as bringing satisfaction.

### ***Psalm 119:9-11***

***9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. 10 With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. 11 Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.***

The Word of God should be to us as a gold mine is to the miner. That's were we should spend our time. Some of my favorite thoughts from Psalm 119 are found in verses 97-104. This is the Christ-centered life. This is walking in Him.

***97 O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. 98 Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, For they are ever mine. 99 I have more insight than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. 100 I understand more than the aged, Because I have observed Your precepts. 101 I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word. 102 I have not turned aside from Your ordinances, For You Yourself have taught me. 103 How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! 104 From Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.***

And “***therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.***” How have you responded to the call to “***walk in Him***”? Are you walking in Him? These are yes or no questions, beloved. If you even hesitate, then repent, turn away from your walking in and for yourself and beg of the Lord that you may be seen and known for walking in Jesus.

# Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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## III. Recognize the resources (2:7)

*...having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed...and overflowing with gratitude.*

So, if we are to live the Christ-centered life, we must first receive Christ Jesus the Lord; I pray that you have done this; and then, secondly, we must respond to the call to “so walk in Him.” I pray that you are doing this.

But how do we so walk in Jesus? It seems as though there is so much pulling us away from Christ, so much that entices us to Christlessness. How are we to combat all this?

Our final point is this, we must recognize the resources of God. God did not call us to walk in Him and has not caused us to receive Jesus without resources for the tasks. Beginning in verse 7 we have a series of participles in the Greek, phrases that point us back to how it is we can “**walk in Him.**” This then is how we can live the Christ-centered life.

### 1. A Firm Foundation

First, we must recognize the resource of a firm foundation. Our text reads, “**having been firmly rooted...**” Let me say that the first three descriptions of how we can live this Christ-centered life are stated in the passive voice, meaning that we are to see that living the Christ-centered life begins by seeing what God has done for us so that we might walk in Jesus.

This first statement is not only passive but it is what we call a perfect passive in the Greek. This means that what is described is something that has taken place in the past but has continual effect and influence into the present and on into the future. What we are to learn then is that God, not us, but God has laid a foundation which is forever laid, a foundation never needing to be rebuilt and never to be found as inadequate. This is the Lord’s doing and it is to be marvelous in our eyes!

There are two possible pictures painted by Paul here by saying we are “firmly rooted.” The first is that of a great tree that has its roots deeply tapped into the rich soil and therefore never lacking in resources to grow. This verse reminds me of Psalm 1:3 which describes the one who delights in the Word of God as “a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither.” In both Psalm 1:3 and here in Colossians 1:7, the tree did not plant itself but rather is cultivated, placed there by a wise gardener who gives to the tree everything needed to grow.

The second picture this phrase paints for us is that of a building whose foundation is laid sure and true. Again, being a in the passive voice reminds us that it is not the building that laid the foundation, but the Builder, who carefully and soundly laid so firm a foundation as to support a great structure. We are being reminded that everything in the Christian life arises out of the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ – out of this knowledge of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. Therefore, if we ever seek to build anything in our Christian life that does not fit the foundation, then it is futile and it will fail. We must then keep looking at the foundation that God has laid for us. This means to keeping our eyes on Jesus, upon Him crucified and buried for our sins, and risen from the dead on the third day.

### 2. A solid structure

But not only do we need this firm foundation, the beginning point that we’ve been brought to by God so that we might grow; so that we might walk in Jesus, but also, in keeping with the

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construction metaphor, Paul as relates that the building process is never to stop. We read, “having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him.” Paul shifts from the perfect passive “having been” to the present passive which tells us that not has God done something in past by which we my walk in Jesus, He also continues to do something in the present by which we my walk in Jesus. The Christian life, and particularly the Christian’s experience of becoming more and more like Christ is to be like that of the Energizer bunny. It is to keep going and going and going! I heard a great description of what is meant here. We are not to think of the Christian life as some single story ranch house, or even as a two or three story mansion. Rather, we are to think of the Christian life as a skyscraper that has unlimited potential for adding story upon story because its foundation is the infinite sufficiency of Jesus Christ. We might ask one another, “How tall are you in the Lord!”

But notice that it’s not just anything that is being built up. We are being built up “in Him” that is in the realm of Jesus, as a reflection of who He is and what He has done. Everything in our lives is to demonstrate the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. The one who is being built up in Him is seeing this more and more and reflecting this more and more to others. Are you being built up in Him by God the Father? Are you seeing yourself becoming more and more like His Son Jesus Christ? Isn’t this the very stated purpose of God as found in Romans 8:29?

***For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren.***

Let us remember that God continues to work on those whom He foreknew until each one of them are a reflection of His Son, Jesus Christ. The Christ-centered life is about becoming like Jesus. And we are enabled by God to walk in Him as we become more and more like Him.

### **3. A Formidable Faith**

The third description of how we may walk in Him literally reads in verse seven, “***and being established in your faith***” – this is also a present passive statement, meaning that it is God who is currently establishing or continually strengthening your faith. How does God establish or strengthen our faith. By teaching us, instructing us to understand and appreciate further the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. Our faith is to increase and become something formidable, unshakeable.

Notice that this statement has a bit more explanation than the others. God is establishing their faith just as they had been instructed; just as they had been taught in the previous verses. The point is that God is adding to the comprehension of truth. They are growing in faith, growing in the knowledge of Christ is. Remember that I said earlier, the more we come to know about Christ, the more our lives should be lived in Christlikeness. The more that God establishes us in our faith, the more consistently we can and should walk in Jesus.

This particular statement, that we are being established in our faith, while it all begins with God as clearly revealed in the passive verb, is yet something we must also participate with God. It is our faith. As believers, we are called to grow in our understanding of divine truth. We are to long for a greater knowledge of all that is given in the Word. We are to long to learn and live out more of the gospel. We must never think we have grown past the need of the gospel. Charles Spurgeon recounts the attitude of the Puritan, Samuel Rutherford, who “used to pray for a larger

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## Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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heart, that he might hold more of Christ.” Even the beloved hymn makes this point saying, “More of Jesus, I would know....More, more about Jesus! More, more about Jesus! More of His saving fullness see; more of His love who died for me.” How can we walk in Jesus? Let us long for more of Jesus and pray that God would strengthen and increase our faith to that end.

#### IV. The reasonable result (2:7b)

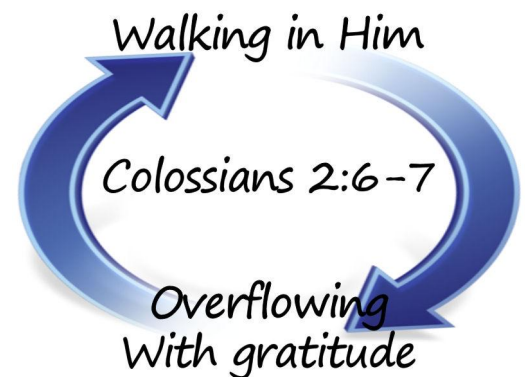
... and overflowing with gratitude.

I struggled with whether or not to make this last point one of the recognized resources above or to set it apart. The reason to include it with the list above it is also a participle that is describing the how we are to walk in Jesus. But unlike the other three participles, this one is not passive; but rather is stated as a present active, meaning that this is something we do, the result of having been firmly rooted and being built up and established in our faith, and ultimately then how we can know we are rightly walking in Jesus is that our lives are **“overflowing with gratitude.”**

The author Kent Hughes noted, “A thankless spirit betrays a life which is no longer focusing on the greatness of Christ.” If I could restate this to be consistent with what I have been constantly bombarding you, “A thankless spirit betrays a life which is no longer focusing on the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ.” Beloved, you cannot be walking in Christ if you have a spirit of ingratitude. If you are not thankful for what God is doing in your life, whether it is seemingly bad or extraordinarily good, then you are not living the Christ-centered life. The word of God declares here that the life being worked up by God is one that is “overflowing” – literally superabounding, or flowing over to excess with gratitude, thankfulness, grateful humility toward all that God has done for you.

The question for us, “Is overflowing gratitude the result of walking in Him or is walking in Him the result of overflowing gratitude toward God?” We might be tempted to go only with the first, that overflowing gratitude is the result of walking in Him? And I do agree with this, but if this participle is describing how we walk in Him, then we must also conclude that in order to walk in Jesus, we must be a people who are constantly thanking God for all He has done for us in Jesus.

This is how then we walk in Him; how we live the Christ-centered life; we respond to call to walk, to live in or according to Christ; and then we recognize the resources as God has rooted us, builds Christlikeness in us, strengthens our faith in the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ and all this causes us to overflow with gratitude toward God. I pray that this is your hearts desire and will become your increasing pursuit!



*Soli Deo Gloria*

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