

Colossians 2:6-7 is the summary statement of the heart of the entire letter. In this brief sentence, Paul gets right to the purpose for which he has written the entire letter. It is a very Christ-centered statement, based upon a certain and particular Christ: Jesus, the Lord, having been taught and proclaimed to them in a tradition and worldview passed down to them. And as they received that Christ, according to that teaching, they were to live their lives in the light of Him and His significance.

The preceding part of the book and the exposition of the character of this Jesus, of His authority and supremacy in His deity, God's fullness pleased to dwell in Him, and the sufficiency of His work because of it, what we could call a “high Christology” section, is chained to the following chapters (2:6-4:6) by the link of 2:6-15, and most pointedly here in this simple exhortation to walk in the same manner as we have received Christ Jesus the Lord.

You see, this is the effort and growth of Christian maturity. It is not as if the gospel is the entrance to the Kingdom of God and then we must move on from it and learn new something beyond it, gain mystical wisdom in order to go ‘further’ or obtain powerful encounters with God. No, the beginning of the Christian life and the end of the Christian life and the path upon which we walk between them is all the same. That is what Paul is saying. Just as you entered into this new life with God, you are to walk in that same manner, upon that same truth, by means of the same faith. You see, growth in the Christian life is not gaining new things, or obtaining new things, but rather walking in the light of the things which have already been established by God through Christ Jesus for you. Christian maturity is the progression of walking in the light of God's sovereign work in Christ Jesus, and not the delusion of some kind of destiny we must discover and obtain, as if it were still in the domain of darkness. Rather, we strive to entrust all things to Him and to walk in the reality of God's great grace towards us in His beloved Son with whom we receive all the blessings of God by faith.

So, when Paul says, “As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord”, what does he mean and what are the implications? Well, first we see that this clearly a comparative statement, for he uses the word “as” or “in the same manner.” Therefore, however we

received Christ Jesus is the same manner by which we are to live our lives. Thus, it is of utmost importance that we grasp the apostle's meaning of how we received the Lord.

To do so, let's begin with the word "to receive." More than a mere welcome, this word was a religious and philosophical word which described an initiate's reception of the truth claims of a certain tradition of philosophical worldview. It is to receive something which is taught and to reorder one's life around it. Paul uses it this way many times in describing Christians receiving the traditions and the significance of the gospel (1 Cor 11:23; 15:1,3; Gal 1:9,12; 1 Thess 4:1-2; 2 Thess 3:6) as the truth. These are the bookends in this thought between teaching and receiving. Here, at the beginning, you have the word "you received" and later in the phrase you have "as you were taught". This relationship between teaching and receiving is a constant description in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, where the early church is described as devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles, Luke described the work of evangelism as "teaching the people" (4:2; 5:25,42) and "teaching the word of God" (18:11) among other phrases. Teaching the Word of God is the foundational means of knowing God, through Jesus Christ, and therefore of true and genuine Christianity.

But what is strange here is that Paul doesn't merely say that we have received a mere set of principles, or a tradition, but rather a person, Jesus. Now, there is inherent in the phrase "as you were taught" that this person and His significance and the implications of Him are something which forms a worldview and a tradition, but the reception of Jesus as the centerpiece of all of God's story, of creation, of justice, of redemption, of restoration, is the foundation of Christianity. At its root, the Christian faith is not merely a reception of a set of principles which govern the cosmos, though it includes all those things as secondary implications, but the Christian faith is, at its root, the reception of a person as the Truth and to whom I must submit all my thinking and valuation and loves and honor and who determines the worldview, the tradition, and the principles because He is the Truth and point of all of history.

You see, Jesus of Nazareth is not merely a sage with wisdom to dispense, He is wisdom itself. He is not merely an example for us of what a human in right relationship to God

is supposed to live like, He is God himself. He is not merely a teacher who came to show us the way to an abundant life, He is the way and life itself.

This is one of the realities which distinguishes Christianity from every other world religion, because in any other religion, if you substituted any other person for the primary proclaimer of that religion, you still have the same religion. If it wasn't Muhammad who received the Quran, for example, but Ali, you still have the same Quran. Islam is not dependent upon Muhammed. It could have been some other prophet who received the Quran, and Islam would remain the same. If you substitute Siddhartha Buddha with some other Buddha, you still have the principles of the Tao which govern Buddhist worldview. We don't even know who founded Hinduism, and it doesn't matter to Hinduism. All other religions are built upon the teaching of principles, but Christianity is based upon and utterly reliant upon a distinct individual and not principles. If you remove Jesus from Christianity and try and substitute another leader, you don't have Christianity any longer. The doctrines and principles of the Christian worldview are utterly dependent upon the unique and particular Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, and only He is capable and sufficient for its requirements.

For, Paul does not merely say that we have received Jesus, but that we have received the Christ Jesus, the unique and anointed Son of God, the true and greater Adam who does not fail the test of obedience, the Seed of Eve who crushes the serpent's head, the real ark which carries His people through the flood of God's wrath, the offspring of Abraham who receives all the promises of God's blessing, the true King who rules over all the heavens and the earth and who alone exercises dominion and authority and power. For, this Christ is the Lord, says Paul. We receive Jesus, the Christ, the Lord.

These three words: Christ, Jesus, Lord, constitute the very basic profession of the faith: Christ Jesus is Lord. Now, we might not think that is a big deal, to profess such a thing, but that is because we have been born and raised in a world which is largely formed by the Christian worldview. We must remember what it was like for our brothers and sisters throughout times and cultures where this was not true, when the church has to meet in secret, in catacombs, and underground because to make such profession was seen as a threat to society. In the times of the Colossians, only Caesar was seen as Lord,

and any other worldview brought imminent danger to society from the gods.

Therefore, to profess Christ Jesus the Lord was to put one's life on the line.

And don't think that this is so very distant from own place and time. Back in 2017, Timothy Keller wrote an article for the Gospel Coalition entitled, *What We Can Learn from the Early Church*, in which he wrote, **"The earliest church was seen as too exclusive and a threat to the social order because it would not honor all *deities*; today Christians are again being seen exclusive and a threat to the social order because we will not honor all *identities*."** Walking in union with Christ Jesus the Lord means that the authority for what we believe to be true, honorable, and good, is not determined by anything, even my own self-determination, but only by Jesus alone. The more that this Lordship, this authority over all definitions of real, good, true, and right, contradicts the power structures of the world, the more of a threat that such a profession, and a life lived consistently with it, will be to those power structures. To live in obedience to the lordship of Christ is progressively becoming threatening to Western society. And it is not merely the Christian sexual ethic that is seen as a threat, but the authority upon which it is based: Christ Jesus the Lord. It was the same in the early church, where it normal for married men to have sexual relationships with prostitutes, slaves, and even children. But, Christians abstained from any sex outside of heterosexual marriage, and such an ethic isolated and distinguished them from the broader society. Such a profession is increasingly becoming more intolerable in our age, too, but here is what is interesting: Keller continued, **"The early church surely looked like it was on the 'wrong side of history,' but instead it changed history with a dogged adherence to the biblical gospel."** Receiving Christ Jesus the Lord surely involves a chaste sexual ethic, but it also means that we give generously because we have been given so much in Him; we use our power to strengthen the weak because the Son of God emptied Himself to rescue us; we honor all men as image-bearers of God; we love our enemies and forgive those who hate us, that we bear crosses, endure persecution, that we suffer with Christ that we might be glorified with Him. We do not merely lament the loss of Christian influence, and we surely don't justify sinful means to try and hold onto it. We simply continue walking in the light of the gospel, in every way corrected by it and encouraged by it and hoping in it.

Therefore, let us be wise and prepared, O Church, for these words of receiving Jesus are free, but they are not without cost. As we received Him, Christ Jesus the Lord – we do so because He truly is the Lord, and His rule is good. We receive Him, not because it is popular or because it gains us power and authority and pleasure in this world, but because it is true and our hope of glory is contained in Him.

For, when a person receives Jesus, as taught, they receive Him by faith alone. They do not merely believe the facts about Him, but they entrust their very souls to Him because of the claims which He made and the significance of His person and work. To receive Jesus as the Christ is to receive Him as the substitute for your sins, as the Lamb of God who pays down my sin-debt against God; as my Champion who delivers me from the domain of darkness and into whose Kingdom of Light I am transferred by God through Him; as my guarantee and security of all of God's blessings for me; as the Resurrection and the Life to whom I entrust my very blood and sweat and tears in order to persevere in a world which seeks my ruin. **You see, to receive Jesus as Christ and Lord changes EVERYTHING about how I view EVERYTHING.**

For, what see around us is not *just* Nature, it is HIS world. It is not *just* a child, it is HIS image-bearer. It is not *just* a choice, it is cosmic treason against HIS order. It is not my truth, it is my blind and limited opinion. I do not get to self-identify. He identifies me. When He tells me that I am crooked deep down, He is right. Yet, He does not merely reveal such truth to me in order to shame me, but in order to rescue me. He points out my brokenness in order to heal me. He leads me through the valley of deep darkness, and I must entrust my way to the One who can see through the dark because He is the Light. Jesus, the Christ, the Lord over all, changes everything. We receive Christ Jesus the Lord because He is, and it changes everything for good.

Now, live like this! Says the apostle. To “walk” is a metaphor for living life, for active choices and intentions and manner of getting from present points in life to future points which we desire, from the little things (I wake up and my goal is to eat breakfast) to the bigger things (I am new at a job and my goal is to be productive and beneficial, to gain sustenance for my family, etc.) to the biggest things (What is my goal in life? What is my purpose? Why am I doing anything?). To walk in the same way as we received

Christ Jesus the Lord is to live our lives, from intentions to methods to means, in the light of your union with this Christ Jesus the Lord.

For, you received Him by being united to Him through faith alone. When you entrusted yourself to this one, you received His work as your own and He took upon Himself your sins as if they were His own. This uniting is what it means to believe in Jesus. You will be glorified with Him, provided that you suffer with Him, said Paul to the Philippians. This is union language. You died to sin, so how can you still live in it, Paul asked the Romans incredulously. That's union language. When you received Christ you were baptized into His death for sins, you died with Him, so live as one freed from sin and raised to the newness of life. That's union language.

The gospel, the good news of what God has done through Jesus Christ, is good news for sinners because of this union. So, walk as one united to Christ Jesus, by faith alone, and Paul will go on in the following chapters to describe what it looks like to walk as one united to Christ Jesus the Lord. It is as if Paul is emphatically saying, "You were united to Christ and to no other, for He is the Lord, so He establishes your values, illuminates your thinking, and directs your conduct. Trust Him!"

And in order to further drive the establishment of this relationship between "as you received" and "so walk in Him", Paul uses three passive participles to elucidate for us what this looks like. You see them in the ESV in the words "rooted", "built up", and "established."

Now, firstly, each of these verbs are participles. What this means is simply that they are being use to describe what has happened when you received Jesus and what it implies for how you live your life.

These three words metaphorically describe what it means to be united to Christ Jesus and describe the end goal of this union. They are brilliant ways of doing both. And they are all passive. This means that we are not the ones doing them. Someone else is doing them to us. Do not miss this, and it is somewhat difficult to see when we read too quickly, but we are to walk in our union with Christ *because God is working these*

things in us and to us. So, as we look at each one more closely, let us see what this fact implies.

First, “having been rooted in Him”. Here is an agricultural metaphor, like growing and bearing fruit in chapter one, we have the idea of being rooted in Christ, the source of our life, the nourishment from which we draw all productivity and activity, the wisdom into which we are planted and the anchor which holds us firm in the tumultuous storms. He is the foundation and spring our life, and God has planted us there. God has rooted us and will keep us rooted (perfect form) in Christ.

Do you see the partial moving towards the complete in this image? Plants, having been rooted in good soil, grow into maturity and bear fruit. There is a pattern here of partial to complete in each of these images, but each is also exemplifying the security and certainty of reaching its potential, not because of the strength of the believer, but, being passive verbs, because of the strength of the God who is working each one from its beginning, through its maturity, to its end.

What are the implications of Christ Jesus the Lord as the source of our life? This means that we reject the call of the flesh, the world, and the enemy of God, to try and find root in anything else. We do not put our hope in our comfort or pleasure, in power or control, in our security of possessions, in our intellectual success or the recognition of our value by men. The source and power of living the fullness of life is found in nothing else but our union with Jesus – no power, no scheme, no method but entrusting ourselves to Jesus, the Christ, the Lord.

The next verb is “being built up in Him.” It is an architectural metaphor, an image of a building being constructed, brick by brick, mortar line by mortar line, up into an edifice complete and unshakable. Do you see the partial moving towards the complete in this image? You are *being* built up. You are not yet finished, but you will be. How do I know? Because God is doing the building, not you. Remember, it is a passive verb. God is building you up in Christ. How are you built up? How do you progress towards completion? In Christ. Establishing your values in Him, your loves coming into line with His loves, seeing more of Him accurately and immensely, seizing the depths and magnitude of His grace, His justice, His love, His wrath, His self-sacrifice, His

gentleness, His power, His authority, etc. It is in entrusting our very lives to Jesus that we are transformed, built up, into what God has designed us to be.

This is the same image that Paul uses elsewhere, of the Temple of God, which you who are in Christ are. You are being built up on the cornerstone of Christ Jesus and the foundation of the apostles and prophets who proclaimed to you the gospel, into the temple, stone by stone, among whom the glory of God will dwell for all eternity and reflect to the cosmos the grace of God through the sacrifice of His eternal Son for sinners who are now reconciled through Him. This is Gods' work. You are His holy building, and the completion of this edifice is not contingent upon you, but upon the builder, and the means of transformation in your life is not positive thinking or grin-and-bear it methods, but entrusting your situations, your struggles, your hopes, your fears, your very lives, to Him. The gospel is our means of sanctification.

The third passive verb is a legal word, a word used in contracts and agreements in the ancient world, “you are being established.” It means to confirm beyond a reasonable doubt, to prove just cause. Therefore, God is confirming the righteousness of His inclusion of you into His family, proving beyond any doubt that the evidence is incomparable that you are righteous before Him, and this evidence speaks better than the blood of Abel, for it is the blood of Christ Jesus the Lord. Every accusation against you cannot stand, even if true, for you have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the RIGHTEOUS one, whose establishment is always righteous and just. Every slander of the enemy, every evidence of sin, every accusation of blame, is being answered one by one, day by day, moment by moment, by the justifying proofs of their conclusion because you are united to the Lamb of God whose atonement is sufficient for each of them, so that He might present you before His Father holy, blameless, and beyond reproach. This is not because you have not sinned, but because His blood pays down your debt and His righteousness justifies the requirements of holiness. This is the gospel: substitution of the Righteous for the Unrighteous, received by faith alone and not by works, and by which you are being established as those justified by God.

This is God's work. You are God's holy and righteous people because you are united to the holy and righteous Christ Jesus our Lord, beloved and chosen children of God.

What better news is there for sinners?! What better and more encouraging announcement is there for you today, you who know guilt and who feel shame?!

Your hope of being established before the judgment seat of God is not your own success, but His, and not your own moral aptitude, but His moral perfection!

This truth also frees the Christian to freely admit the depravity of his own soul, the wickedness of the thoughts which arise in his heart, to condemn them as sinful and evil and worthless, and yet not to despair at such an exposition of their presence. It is with great confidence that the Christian repents daily, of both actions and their source, the self-centered intentions of a heart which too often seeks to build its own kingdom and deny God the rightful place of sovereign. If faith, that dependence upon Jesus Christ as our substitute, is the breathing in of the Christian life, then repentance, the recognition and repudiation of such self-centered and self-autonomous desires and deeds, is the breathing out. If faith is relying on Christ Jesus to establish us, to root us, and to build us up, then repentance is the repudiation of anything and everything else to do such things. Therefore, the work of God's grace, uniting us to Christ Jesus the Lord, normalizes within His people the continual reiteration of repentance and faith, dying daily to sin and rising daily to the newness of life in Him, just we constantly breath in and out.

Thus, all of these words, "having been rooted in Him" and "being built up in Him" and "being established in the faith" describe and clarify the source of our life (rooted), the means of our growth (being built up), and the establishment of our case (being established) as the context in which we are to live our lives. Live as those of whom these things are true, because they are in Christ Jesus the Lord!

And because all of this is true, real, eternal, ultimate, and because they are the work of God, we are to "abound in thanksgiving" to God. The first active verb is to walk and the second, here, is to overflow. We are live our lives overflowing with gratitude.

GOD's work in uniting us to Christ Jesus as the source, the means, and the establishment of our life is something to be thankful for.

A good question to ask ourselves is, “Is my life characterized by gratitude?” **If the reality is that, as I can surely and often attest, my life is characterized by complaining, then what is the reason?** Is it not that I have functionally and emotionally forgotten the greatness and kindness and extravagance of God’s work for me? Is it not because I have lost sight of the value of what it means to have my name written in the Book of Life in the presence of the uncreated, holy, omnipotent God? It is! That is the only reason! For, if my heart seized upon the incomparable greatness of God’s kindness to me, in spite of the reality that I am an utter mess, in both weakness and wickedness, then such gratitude would overflow into the joy of my salvation!

Admittedly, this is an area in which I, myself, struggle. It is an area of unbelief which seized my heart just this past week and swallowed up my thoughts and my feelings in despair and feelings of futility. Why? Because the troubles of this world, I overvalued, and the one who has conquered them, I undervalued. Jesus promised us, in this world we will have troubles, but we are to “take heart”, for He has overcome such a troubling world (John 16:33). My brother Jon Lutes pointed out to me this week that when the disciples were sent out by Jesus and saw demons being cast out by their ministry, they came back rejoicing at such a great expression of ministry success and power. Yet, Jesus did not rejoice with them, even though such ministry was good, but instead reordered their joy by saying, “Do not rejoice that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names stand written in heaven.” (Luke 10:20)

This reordering of our lives upon the most significant implications of the truth is vital to walking in thanksgiving. For, even if the spirits were not subjected to us, our names are written in heaven, and that is great cause to abound in gratitude. Even if cancer wins, or death continues, or rejection is constant, or failure is imminent, you are united to Christ Jesus, your hope of glory. Keep the greatest implications of the truth at the center, and your joy will abound. But if you put some other implication, the temporal and fading away things, at the center of your thoughts and pursuits, then your joy will dry up.

Thus, how are we to walk in the same way as we received Christ Jesus the Lord? We must fix our eyes upon Him, to behold His beauty which won our hearts to begin with.

If we have been centering our lives, pursuits, expectations, thoughts, and perusals upon other things, even good things, then we must push them outward to the place where they belong, orbiting around the great and eternal reality, the most significant truth that if you are united to Christ Jesus the Lord, you have the hope of glory, and the joy of your salvation will not be evaporated by the losses of this world or the struggles in your own wills, but will overflow in the greatness of God's great grace towards you in rooting you in the LORD, in building you up in the LORD, and in establishing you in the faith which sees, at its end result, the fullness of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

For He...is...the fullness of life.