

So you're a Christian ... what next?

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[0 : 00] The reading this morning is from Colossians chapter 2 verses 6 to 15 and that's on page 1183 of the Pew Bible, page 1183.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead.

[1 : 21] When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us.

He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, Ruth, for reading that. If you can keep your Bibles open, that would be a great help.

Page 1183, as we look at this portion of Colossians chapter 2 together. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet that you can follow along with that you'd find helpful just to see where we're going with this.

And let's pray and ask for God's help. May the words of my mouth and the thoughts and reflections of all of our hearts be pleasing in your sight.

[2 : 28] O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen. Well, in some areas of life, you can find yourself realizing my best years are behind me.

I was thinking that about some of my former eating habits. Now that I'm over the age of 40, I remember as a student, one of my mates, for his birthday, we did a burger crawl.

So we went around the town and we had a burger at every burger joint across the evening. Six burgers. I couldn't do that now. But maybe we think of it when we think about sport.

Physically, maybe our best years are behind us, some of us. And we might reflect back on happy sporting memories. The longer it was since we played, the better we were.

And the best years are behind us. Now the danger is we can think something like that in our Christian lives. I look back on a season of life when I became a Christian around 21 years old.

[3 : 29] There was a season of life where there was quite extraordinary for me speed of growth. And it was a joyful time of reshaping the way that I thought about the world, about myself, about other people.

Sharing faith in quite significant conversations with good friends. And since then, there have been seasons of the Christian life where it's felt a lot more like I'm just plodding along.

There's less obvious progress. There are fewer signs of growth and change. And when we feel like that, we might find ourselves looking around for something else.

Something turns our heads. Or we might simply become disillusioned and think, there doesn't seem to be much more to this. Well, we come to this letter in Colossians.

And it assures us that for the Christian, if we get things right, we can always say, our best years are ahead of us. Of course, that's true when we think about our future when Jesus returns or calls us home, our life beyond the grave.

[4 : 37] But we can also feel optimistic, hopeful about our Christian life in the years to come while we wait. And we're going to see why that is this morning, if we stay on the right track.

But we're also going to hear the Apostle Paul warn us that if we get things wrong, we're in real danger. So let's dive into verses 6 and 7, which I think, and lots of people think, are the key verses in the letter.

Our first point, want a better future? Keep walking in Christ. Look at verse 6. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

So Paul begins with reassurance. We've seen in our sermon series that he wrote this letter to a group of Christians he'd never met in Colossae. But he's confident that the truth they heard from Epaphras, who brought them the news about Jesus, the gospel, that it was the true truth.

And he's reassured them in chapter 1 of the letter, the gospel has done so much for you. He's talked to them in chapter 1 verse 13 about how they were in the domain of darkness.

[5 : 59] They were in the dark without Jesus. And when they heard the news about Jesus and received it in faith, they were rescued by God and brought into the kingdom of light, where now they stand with redemption and the forgiveness of sins.

And the gospel is at work in their lives, bearing fruit. He pointed out that they have this fruit of love for one another that's come from them hearing about Jesus. That's the gospel.

And so Paul says in verse 6, continue. Continue to live your lives in Christ. If you want to grow, if you want the next five years as a Christian to be the best yet, invest in knowing Christ.

And Paul gives us pictures that display the kind of Christians we want to be. First in verse 7 he says, rooted in him. We've been a couple of times to the Benmore Botanical Gardens.

I don't know if you've been there on Argyle near Danoon. Where you have this stunning avenue of giant redwood trees. 49 of them are 150 years old and 50 meters high.

[7 : 10] I think we've got a picture of them. And they're just these colossal trees. And there's one redwood in the avenue of 50 that is just over half the height of the others.

Because there was a hurricane in 1968. And one of the redwoods fell in the hurricane. And they planted a new one. And it's about half the height.

But if that redwood was feeling insecure, I'm not sure that trees can feel insecurity. But if we imagine that they could and that they did, then it needs to know it's in the right place.

All it needs is a few more years of Argyle sunshine and rainwater. And the care they give it in the botanics. And it will grow as tall as the trees around it.

In fact, redwood trees, their rate of growth increases over time. So how do they get to be so steadfast, so apparently stable and healthy and full of vitality?

[8 : 11] They've got extraordinary root systems. Roots that spread out from each tree up to 100 meters in every direction. And so it is in the Christian life that if we want to grow to be a giant redwood kind of Christian, steady and strong, healthy and fruitful and full of life, we have all we need in Christ.

You don't move on from him. You put your roots down deeper in him. Devote yourself to learning more of him. And we can do that through Paul's ministry.

Last week we heard him defend his ministry. If you just look up in the Bible to chapter 2, verse 3, he talks about how in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

It's all there in him. And so Paul defends his ministry in chapter 1, verse 28. He says, He, Christ, is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

And we have the access to that ministry that can present us fully mature in Christ through the pages of Scripture, where we have Paul's ministry and the other apostles there.

[9 : 32] And we can put our roots down in Christ. Back to verse 7 then, a second picture. He says, So we move from the giant redwoods to the skyscrapers of Hong Kong Island.

Some of you, just a reminder of where you moved from. Just on the right there. And as we think about skyscrapers, they're so strong. And the building on the left there is the Shard in London, the tallest building in Western Europe, over 300 meters high.

It towers over London. And again, to build it up that high, they had to go deep into the ground. They had 166 piles that they drove into the ground, up to 50 meters down, so that they could then build the strong tower, the Shard that reaches to the skies.

So how will we get strengthened to grow tall in the Christian life? Well, look at verse 7. Paul says, So again, there's no secret that's missing.

There's no new teaching that the Colossians need to try and access somewhere. All they need to become mature is in the gospel. It's in the faith as they have been taught.

[10 : 54] You get built up, not by moving on, but by going deeper. Then our third picture in verse 7 is of a gushing fountainhead or waterfall.

Verse 7, Strengthened in the faith as you were told, and overflowing with thankfulness. Now, Victoria Falls is one of the seven natural wonders of the world, where the water of the Zambezi River has come through Zambia, and it comes crashing down a drop of over 90 meters.

And in the rainy season, the water that falls in Zambia is so massive that the flow of water over Victoria Falls is 500 million liters every minute coming over.

So there's the picture. What should we see flowing out from the Christian when we meet them? Paul says, Thankfulness. Just as we heard in prayer a few weeks ago, as he prayed for maturity in the church, chapter 1, verses 9 to 14, we thought about the KFC prayer that Paul prays, that we can pray for every Christian we know.

The K for knowledge, growing in the knowledge of God's plan in Christ. The F, that that would lead to fortitude, there'd be strength in to endure. The C for cheerfulness, for thankfulness and joy.

[12 : 13] We talked about TJ Maxx, maximum thanksgiving and joy, as they grow in grasping what Jesus has done for them. And as we see these three pictures, do they not draw you in to want the best years in your Christian life to be ahead of you?

The redwood tree with its rooted vitality, the skyscraper strengthened and built, the fountainhead overflowing with thankfulness. Who of us, hearing those pictures today, would want to say, no, I think I've got to where I want to be as a Christian.

I've arrived. No, we're given that these images fuel an ambition in us to grow, to conform more and more to those pictures in five years' time than we do today.

Well, Paul says, continue to live in Christ. The way on in the Christian life is the same as the way in. You grow in the gospel. But he needs to write this letter because ambition to grow can put us in danger.

And that's our second point. Want to be free? Don't move from Christ. So now we get a much more alarming picture from Paul in verse 8. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world, rather than on Christ.

[13 : 47] So the picture is a horrific one, isn't it, there? It's of being kidnapped. And when Paul uses the word philosophy there as the thing that might take us captive, he's talking about a system of thought, a way of thinking that might lead us astray.

And we might be better to think, given what he says about it, about religion. But the danger isn't from another religion, a pagan religion, that might lead the Colossians astray.

The bigger threat is the false teacher inside the church, still carrying the banner of Christianity, but who says, you know, the gospel you heard about Jesus, it got you on the first rung of the ladder, but now you need next level Christianity.

And I've got the secret, the silver bullet. For the growth that's been holding you back, because you've not had it. And as we go on in the chapter next week, we'll see that this invitation to get more by getting religious comes in different ways.

It can be about ceremonies or rituals, adding religious rites or festivals to your life that please God or get you more of God. Or it can be something mystical.

[15 : 05] If you have this special experience, it will unlock for you unfettered access to the beauty of God. Or it can be ascetic, asceticism, where religion is negative about sex or art or beauty or other things that are enjoyable gifts from God, because it says, well, no, those things are taking you away from God.

So it puts restrictions on you. If you follow our rule of life, you'll have the favor of God, or you'll experience more of God or his blessing.

Rituals, mystical experiences, restrictions, and often these things come together in a religious way of thinking, as a package deal. And the key thing here is that you can get ensnared or kidnapped when those things move you away from wholehearted dependence on Christ alone and thankfulness to him.

There's lots of interest in churches today in these kinds of spirituality. And you might hear a critic say something like this. You know, at St. Silas, you heard the gospel a lot, the news about Jesus.

And it's really good that you hear that at St. Silas, because you needed that to become a Christian. That's great. And you can see that St. Silas has been growing in number.

[16 : 31] But that'll be because the ministry there has drawn in a lot of baby Christians, people who haven't been Christians all that long. And they need to hear the gospel again to get clear on that.

But when you get a bit older in the Christian life, you need something more, something else that gives you more of God. And Paul wants to reassure us, we don't need anything else.

We don't need the five pillars of Ignatian spirituality or the six rules of life of Benedictine spirituality or the ten steps of St. John of the Cross to climb the mystical ladder of divine love.

Or being told that we need the big tent experience of being with a particular worship leader because in their music, they can bring you into the presence of God in a way that others can't.

Or that we need new patterns of prayer based on Eastern meditation where you empty your mind in solitude. Whenever we hear any idea like that from someone else who's saying, this is what's helped me, you need this.

[17 : 37] The question that Colossians is calling us to ask is, will this help me continue to live in Christ? Will it help me put my roots down in him, build myself up in him, and be more thankful to him?

Or is this a sideways move, moving me away from Jesus, offering me more of God? So Paul urges us, grow deeper in the gospel, don't be taken captive, and he knows that we might be promised more elsewhere.

So he gives us our third point. Looking for more? It's all yours in Christ. And that's in verses 9 to 15. Have a look at verse 9. Paul says, So what does that fullness mean?

Well, for every Christian, you are fully alive, if you're a Christian. We have fullness of life. Paul gives us two pictures of that life we now have.

The Old Testament picture of circumcision, and the New Testament picture of baptism. Circumcision was a mark of God's Old Testament people of having a new identity, separated off from the world, belonging to God.

[19 : 02] And baptism is a picture of having a new life by the Spirit. And just look at Paul using those pictures to describe our new life from verse 11. In him, that's in Christ, you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands.

Your whole self, ruled by the flesh, was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. So for every Christian, we have this union with Jesus that means that we are truly circumcised.

We're cut off from our old way of life where we live for our own desires. And we've been truly baptized in that we've got this new life with Jesus.

I remember a theme park when I was a kid where there was a ride called the Thunder Mountain Railroad and you sat in this kind of... It was the plot of the theme ride was that you were on these mine carts in an old mine that had kind of cut loose and were running away.

[20 : 23] So you were kind of firmly strapped into this mine cart and you set off on this roller coaster. And what was thrilling about it was that you kept thinking you were about to hit a wall at great speed, but at the last millisecond all the time you get turned away because you're on the roller coaster.

So it looked like you were in danger, but of course you're not in danger because it's a roller coaster ride. So the cart is firmly clasped onto the track and because you're in the cart, whatever happens to the cart will happen to you.

And for the Christian, you are in Christ now so that whatever happens to him happens to you. He died on the cross and when he died, your old self died with him.

And God raised him to life so that you were raised by God and you are now fully alive spiritually, knowing God with a resurrection life. And if anyone ever makes it look from the time that they are having and the experiences they're having as though full life is found somewhere else, you can say to yourself, but I have Christ.

I have Christ so I am fully alive. And that fullness of life comes with three great benefits that Paul spells out for us. The first is the full presence of God.

[21 : 47] We see that in verse 9. For in Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form and in Christ, you have been brought to fullness.

You could not get any more of God than you find in Christ. You can't get any more, can you, than all the fullness of the deity. And so when you're in Christ, you have access to the full presence of God.

You don't have to go to a special place to find God. You don't need to find a thin space or a transcendent building or a special day of the week. You can go to God, whatever time it is, wherever you are, in Christ.

Second, we have the full approval of God. Let's pick things up halfway through verse 13. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us.

He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. Now when the Romans crucified people, they used to write down on a charge sheet what that person was found guilty of and they would put it above their head as they crucified them.

[23 : 03] So that when you were walking past as a member of the public, you would see them failing in their struggle to survive and you would see written above them what they had done and you learnt the lesson.

And when it comes to the moral law of God, every one of us has a legal debt, charges that stand against us. We were talking at the life course on Thursday night this week about just imagine if the five worst things you've ever thought or said or done were recorded on a movie and we played them tonight on the screen and someone on my table said, bad movie.

Bad movie. And wouldn't that be true of all of us? Imagine those on the charge sheet. The Lord knows those things of each of us and everything we got wrong this past week, the envy, the gossip, the anger, the lust, the pride.

And here we see it as though God wrote out every single thing you are guilty of on a charge sheet and he placed it above the head of Jesus when he died on his cross so that as he died, every spiritual ruler and authority saw Jesus paying your debt in full by his death on the cross.

The debt was very real and there is now no more to pay. It would be unjust for God to punish the same sins twice. He has punished them at the cross.

[24 : 37] You cannot be any more forgiven than you now are. And the third great benefit is that you're fully free from the power of evil. If you look at verse 15, and having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

And it was striking in the summer, we had Andy Simmons with us, our mission partner in Zambia, and he was saying in Zambia, lots of people would think, they're already Christians, but they would think, you know, when stuff goes on in my life, there must be some unseen things happening in the spiritual realm that are affecting me.

If I've got job problems or health problems or relationship problems, something is going on. There's some demonic power at work in the spiritual realm tormenting me.

And what that drives people to, and you'll hear it, people believe this in Glasgow as well, and you'll hear it in churches, and what that drives people to is superstition as they think, I need to do things a certain way so that things go well for me in the spiritual realm, or seeking out a spiritual guru or some special incantation for protection because they feel they need things sorted for them in the spiritual realm.

Well, what does God say here? If you are in Christ, no spiritual power can touch you now unless the Lord allows it because he has resolved to use it for good.

[26 : 16] If you are in Christ, the spiritual weapons of mass destruction were all taken away when Jesus died the death that you should have died and you were raised to life with him.

So you're fully free from the power of evil. As we sing here in one of our songs, who can stand against us if our God is for us? So in Christ, you are fully alive, fully in the presence of God, fully forgiven, fully victorious.

And Paul expects that knowing this deep down in our hearts will protect us from getting kidnapped. Why would that protect us? Because these are exactly the things that people will promise us elsewhere.

Religion can only promise you these things. Christ will give them to you. Religion says to get more of God, to earn the approval of God, to break the power that evil has over your life, you need these rules.

You need these experiences. You need these ceremonies. Paul says you already have it in Christ. You could not have any more of God than you have.

[27 : 29] You could not be any more forgiven than you have been. You could not be any more free from evil than you are. So what's left for us is put your roots down.

Continue to live in Him. So I was thinking this week, how am I going to do that? Well, I'm going to read an Advent book by Alistair Begg. It's called Let Earth Receive Her King.

And day by day, I'm going to use that from the 1st of December, asking God to enlarge my heart in the build-up to Christmas to appreciate Christ more. I have already started it, just to check that I could say this and I thought it would be good.

I think it's going to be a cracker. Let Earth Receive Her King. I'm going to put together a Spotify playlist of 12 to 15 songs that we sing regularly here and hymns, and I'm going to listen to it in the car to help me continue to live in Christ.

And I'm going to try and memorize some Bible verses. I might try that with some verses from Colossians. I'm thinking of using a chapter of Isaiah, chapter 42, because it's one that's very precious to me.

[28 : 37] I'm going to try writing it out a bit more so that the words just get into my heart. What could you do to continue to live in Christ? For some of you, the best way to do that is to try and teach others to step forward and try and be involved in leading a small group here or in meeting up with a friend one-to-one to read the Bible with them.

For all of us, it's about being willing to make time. And if we're willing to keep on doing that, we can always say, as a Christian, I'm optimistic that my best years are ahead of me.

God assures us in verses 6 and 7, you could be more and more like the giant redwood, like the skyscraper, like the overflowing fountain. Continue in Christ.

Let's pray together. You have been given fullness in Him. Heavenly Father, we see these pictures in Colossians of the mature Christian life, the fully alive life, and we thank you for what you've given us in Christ.

By your Spirit, would we be so deeply rooted in the Lord Jesus, built up and strong in Him, that we will endure patiently and overflow with thankfulness and joy.

[30 : 03] Enlarge our hearts, we pray, and fill us with the treasure that's found in knowing Christ better for our good and His glory. Amen.

Amen.