

## How to Grow

*“Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith . . .” (Colossians 2:67)*

Paul had never visited Colossae in south-western Turkey, but he was concerned that the believers there should grow up to maturity in Christ. So he wrote them a letter and, as we read it today, we too benefit from the burning passion which the Lord had given him to *“present every man complete in Christ” (Colossians 1:28)*.

As he starts to write, Paul wants to make sure that he is talking to the right people. So he begins by saying who he is writing to, *“the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae” (1:2)* He often referred to “saints” – who did he mean? Were these some special breed of super Christians? In **1 Corinthians 1:2**, he expands the definition a little: *“. . . to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.”*

He makes it clear that all these descriptions refer to the same people. In other words, the church in Corinth (or anywhere else) consists of those who have been sanctified (i.e. set apart for God) by being in Christ, who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are saints, he says, by calling and the word ‘saints’ simply underlines again the same meaning – those who are set apart for God.

So this is who Paul is writing to in Colossae; those who have been set apart for God by being in Christ, and who call on his name. What does it mean to ‘call on his name’? Think of someone needing rescuing from some danger, calling out for the one who can rescue them. Paul uses the same picture in **Colossians 1:13** :– *“For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.”* Who are the ‘us’? Those who have called on his name, those who have been set apart for God in Christ – saints, in fact!

It is important to get these points clear, because of what Paul goes on to say in the rest of his letter, including the passage we started with: *“Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith . . .” (2:6-7)* The word ‘walk’ comes from the same root as our word ‘peripatetic’, meaning ‘walking around’ – in other words, living our lives! He is writing to those who are ‘saints’, who have called on the name of the Lord and who have been rescued. These are the people who have

“*received Christ Jesus the Lord*”, and it these people whom he longs to see growing to maturity in Christ, every single one of them ready to be presented “*complete in Christ*”.

The situation today is often much more confused. There are often many ‘churches’ in one town and not all the people in them would fit Paul's definitions of ‘saints’. Tragically, there are those who have not ‘called on the name of the Lord’ and received Christ into their lives. They have not been rescued and have not been set apart for God. Although they may belong to an organisation which is called a church, they sadly do not belong to the Lord Jesus and so are not part of his church.

The word translated ‘receive’ means to ‘take to oneself’, and is an active word. In other words, it is not something that happens to us, it is a response which we need to make. Typically, what happens is that we hear (or read) the message of Jesus and God starts to speak to us about our need to respond to his love. When we do, we turn away from our own priorities, our own attempts to justify ourselves, and receive the Lord Jesus Christ with all the marvellous ‘package’ that the Father has given us in him.

Forgiveness and a clear conscience before God and men, release from the slavery of wrong thoughts and actions, a new positive life within us, the power of the Holy Spirit – and that’s just the ‘headlines’! Not that we are suddenly perfect, but rather that we have been joined to the source of an amazing new quality of life. We can describe it as the apostle John did, as becoming ‘sons of God’ (***John 1:12-13***), becoming part of a new family or, as Paul puts it, being transferred into “*the kingdom of His beloved Son*” (***Colossians 1:13***).

There is absolutely no point in trying to ‘walk’ in Christ if we have not received him. If we have not been born into the family of God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus, there is no way that we can grow up to maturity in him.

Some other people attempt another impossible task, and it is perhaps especially to these that Paul turns his attention in the following verses, ***Colossians 2:8-15***. These folk have received Christ, they have been born into the family of God, been transferred out of Satan's domain and into the kingdom of the Father's beloved Son – the full package! But somehow they get diverted, perhaps thinking that they will grow in their Christian experience and effectiveness by man-made wisdom and philosophy. Instead of learning to rely on the grace of God on a daily basis, they may build their ‘Christianity’ into a system, all neatly classified and controlled, where all the ‘right answers’ are learned and churned out at what seems like the appropriate moment. Sometimes we are very impressed by these

people, and may feel that they have it all worked out, while we are still struggling along on the basics.

Paul warns against this man-made approach, calling it captivity, empty deception, “*according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ*” (**Colossians 2:8**). This is the opposite of what he has just encouraged the ‘saints’ to do – live in Christ in the same way that they first received him. He then goes on to underline the fact that these saints have been set free from all these man-made principles through the death of Jesus on the cross – part of the package which they have already received. If we read on to the end of the chapter, we can see that Paul vigorously attacks the legalism that was threatening to enslave the believers along with the man-made philosophy and principles.

Both those who try to ‘walk’ without having ‘received’ and those who have ‘received’ but try ‘walking’ in a man-made, DIY religion sort of way often find themselves caught in the same trap. They are trying to please God by what they do; perhaps how good a show of ‘Christianity’ they put on, or how well they follow the system which either they or someone else has invented.

This is particularly sad in the case of those who have received Christ, because they have already tasted the grace of God and know (in theory at least) that nothing they do can earn them ‘brownie points’ with God. If we find ourselves in this position, we need to ask the Lord to show us the freedom which Paul is writing about here in **Colossians 2**, and maybe look at what he wrote to the churches in Galatia as well.

The churches in that area of central Turkey were being infiltrated by people who tried to impose the Jewish religious law on non-Jewish believers. These new believers had entered new life in Christ through faith in response to the message; now they were being told that they had to conform to a rigorous code of practice in order to grow.

Paul’s indignation is incandescent! “*You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Holy Spirit by works of law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*” (**Galatians 3:13**)

It seems to have been a common delusion then, as now, that believers can grow and mature by following patterns and programmes, by changing the externals rather than by the continuation of the spiritual change which started at new birth. It is much easier to get someone to fit in with a pattern

of external behaviour than to try to ensure their continuing spiritual development. Maybe that is why we too fall into the same trap so easily. Christian leaders, beware!

As he writes, Paul knows from experience that it will take his own suffering, sometimes 24-hour heartache, hard work with the power of God working in him, to teach and train every man towards the maturity that the Lord wants. See **Colossians 1:24-29, 2:13, Acts 20:25-35**.

Little wonder, then, that he is so anxious to see the believers in Colossae growing with true and spiritual growth. Systems and shortcuts might give apparently quick results, but he is concerned for lasting treasure, looking forward to being able to present mature believers to his Lord. Certainly in this letter he gives practical indications of how Christians should behave, but not until he has blasted away the dangerous superstructure of man-made religion and strengthened the Colossian believers in the solid foundations which they have in Christ.

The result (**2:7**)? Christian believers who are:–

1. firmly rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not in programmes and activities, but in Christ himself, personally.
2. being built up in him. An ongoing process, spiritual by nature, in which knowledge of him and dependency on him continues to increase.
3. established in their faith. They know what God has done for them in Christ, certainly the basics, though of course they are still learning!
4. just as they have been instructed. In those days, Paul and the other apostles needed to write letters to pass on vital truth and counteract dangerous false teaching. Nothing much has changed for us! Fortunately, we have those letters still available to us. We will do well to follow the instruction given.
5. overflowing with gratitude. If all the other points seem to be OK, but this one is missing, something is probably wrong. An increasing awareness of what Jesus has accomplished for us and a growing confidence in the gospel will result in a fresh awareness of how much we have been given, his great grace to us!

Dave Taylor . . . . . April 2000

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