

Keep Walking in Faith
Colossians 2:6-10
Temple Baptist Church
12/31/17

Reading: Colossians 2:6-10 (ESV)

Introduction: Dr. Larry Lindquist, a professor of mine at Denver Seminary, and a native of Thief River Falls, Minnesota, tells the story of what it was like to grow up as the son of a Swedish pastor. In fact, Dr. Larry grew up as the son *and* grandson of Swedish pastors. Being of large stock and stature, the Lindquist men were easily spotted around the community of 8,500. But, it wasn't their massive frames that most stood out to the people of Thief River Falls. It was the Lindquist's unwavering faith and exaltation of their Lord Jesus Christ at all times and under all circumstances.

Dr. Larry reflected on the passion for the Gospel that would ooze from his father's lips as he preached the Word of God on Sunday mornings. Although his dad's presentation of the Gospel would have appeared, from an outsider's perspective, to be delivered in a traditional Swedish stoic manner – the sheer weight of his words were enough to bring his listeners to tears.

Dr. Larry reminisced about a time, while in junior high, when he and his family were out to eat at the town's most frequented pizza place on a Saturday night. Dr. Larry shared that he was always nervous to go out in public with his family, because he never knew what God-honoring gesture his pastor/father would make that would wreak havoc on his fourteen-year-old social life. On that particular evening, while several of his friends were sitting in booths next to them going on about things middle-schoolers talk about – Dr. Larry's father decided to say the blessing differently that evening. Although he was always loud and fervent in his prayers, Dr. Larry's dad decided to make a much more pronounced prayer of gratitude for his family and their meal.

Much to his dismay, Dr. Larry's father stood up and stretched out his arms wide in front of the family's table and with a loud booming voice full of zeal and passion for his Savior, thanked God for the meal and the blessing of his family.

Although he was humiliated at the time, this moment is one that Dr. Larry said he will never forget. In fact, it was that very moment – along with the instruction from the Scriptures he had received from his family - that the Holy Spirit used to grow and guide Dr. Larry to walk in his father and grandfather's footsteps of becoming a minister of the Gospel.

In Colossians 2:6-7, the apostle Paul opens the central section of his epistle with this same imagery of walking in another's footsteps when he writes, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."

Often when we hear the language of *receiving Jesus Christ as Lord*, our minds immediately jump to the place in time where a person receives Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, but that is not what we are seeing here in the text. Rather, the apostle Paul is referencing the Colossian Christian's reception of the sacred Christian traditions that were passed down from one group of believers to the next.

In his commentary on the book of Colossians, Robert Wall writes, "Given Paul's earlier references to Epaphras (1:6-7) and to his own mission (1:23-2:3), this phrase probably refers to the spiritual heritage of his Colossian readers, who *received* their theological understanding, confessed in 1:13-23, from Paul's Gentile mission and particularly from Epaphras. This is their tradition, their sacred heritage, the religious roots that continue to mark out the boundaries of their life together in Christ."

For several of us, myself included, the act of receiving Christ as Lord as well as leading others to receive Him has at one point or another been the chief goal of our Christian life. While this is an essential part to our Christian calling, it is not the entirety of our responsibility as Christ followers. In Matthew 28:19-20 – the Great Commission – Jesus instructs believers to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching* them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." In these texts – one from Jesus and the other from the apostle Paul – we see the necessity of being taught as well as teaching others.

If we're going to accomplish our life-long mission of making disciples who make more disciples, then we must know that salvation is only the beginning. What is a disciple? A disciple is someone that is rooted in and built up in in the Christian faith in such a robust way that thanksgiving to God is the result.

Salvation is only the beginning

In v. 6-7, the apostle Paul stresses the fact that the Colossian believers were taught from previous generations to be rooted in and built up in the faith by *walking* in Christ Jesus. It's important to note that the author doesn't use the term walk in the past tense, but rather in the present and future active tense. Paul is indicating that once we've come to know Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, the journey towards holiness hasn't reached its conclusion. I think far too often believers think that once the Holy Spirit has prompted their heart to make a declaration of faith to Jesus as Lord that their work is finished. Too often we treat our response to the Gospel like the fine print when we're placing an order on-line. We scroll all the way down to click on the 'Accept' button, but fail to read the text we're stating we agree with.

Our salvation is not determined by what we do or do not do in this life, but if our salvation is genuine then it will produce fruit. If we're not deeply rooted in Scripture daily and in relationship with other believers regularly, then we need to take a long hard look at the authenticity of the relationship we claim to have with Christ.

How can we expect to fulfill the Great Commission Jesus has given us of “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all” that He has commanded, when we ourselves are not observing the very commands we are to teach others? The same commands that others, at some point in the past, have taught us.

I believe this type of faith falls under the auspices of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer coined *Cheap Grace* in his text, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer defines Cheap Grace as, “the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.” I think what Bonhoeffer was saying is that there are costs involved when we come into union with Jesus Christ. Since we can’t save ourselves we trust in Jesus to be our salvation. The cost of receiving salvation in and through Christ is that we now belong to Him; we are no longer our own. Therefore, as genuine followers of Jesus, we forfeit our right to be uninvolved in our spiritual walk. To be frank, when we become genuine followers of Christ we forfeit our right to be lazy in our faith.

We gird up our loins, dig in our heels, and establish ourselves in the faith so that we can grow more like our Savior and so that we are better equipped to make disciples of all nations.

When we make the costly effort to obey our Savior, Psalm 1:3 says that we will be “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.”

Challenges exist

For those of us that have been believers for some time can attest, challenges to being rooted and built up in the faith are at every turn. They are all too common. It’s for this very reason that the apostle Paul tells Colossian believers in v. 8, “See 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.”

Paul warns his Colossian contemporaries to see to it that they do not become captive to the hollow and deceptive philosophies of the day that place human wisdom over the truth of Jesus Christ. The verb *take captive* is used only here in the entirety of the New Testament and suggests an illegal kidnapping. The word for *take captive* sounds a lot like the Greek term for *synagogue*, which theologian N.T. Wright suggests “Paul intentionally chose.... to warn believers not to be taken in by a philosophy with roots in.... Colossian Judaism.”

As it was for Colossian believers, so it is for today’s Christians – we are always being bombarded with something that wants to take the place of our walk with Christ. Believers that have been rescued by the saving grace of Jesus Christ who have been removed from the darkness by the blood of the Son of God and been brought into the light are continuously being threatened by an enemy that seeks to drag them back down into the darkness by way of false teaching.

One of the ways I believe the evil one tries to accomplish his task of tearing us away from light is by telling us that all roads lead to heaven. The Devil says that it is okay to pick and choose whichever aspects of religion that you want – that work for you – and then to discard the rest. The enemy treats all religions as equal and tells us that it is our right to develop our own theology – one that fits our own preferences and our own individualistic endeavors. The evil one uses modern philosophy to spread the lie that if we believe in the absolute truth of the Gospel then we are fundamentally intolerant of progress.

Like a never-ending smorgasbord of “me-ology,” Satan says that it is okay to believe in Jesus as Nature, where the outdoors is the object of your worship. Another item on the menu of me-ology is that Jesus equals worldly wealth and happiness, which is known as the prosperity gospel. This lie tells us that when we accept Jesus Christ as Lord that we will be rewarded with monetary wealth.

Another lie that most of us have probably bought into at one time or another is that we ought always to follow our heart and the instincts of our body. Does not Jeremiah 17:9 say, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick...?”

Yet another lie on the menu of me-ology exists in the form of Jesus equaling feeling good about ourselves. It’s here that the enemy plays on our insecurities to lead us away from the light of the Gospel into darkness. He says that our sins can only be covered partially through Jesus Christ whereas the other portion is dependent on whether we get to the gym this week. Or if we keep our pornography use to a minimum this month. Or if we give away enough of our money this year. Or if we drink less this weekend. Or if we stop flirting with our co-worker so much. Friends, our salvation is not dependent on anything we can or cannot do. It is entirely a free gift of grace from and through Jesus Christ. That doesn’t mean we have a license to sin or that we have no responsibility to continue walking in the faith, but it does mean that we are incapable of saving ourselves.

Ephesians 2:8-9 reads, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Likewise, John 14:6 states, “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” Drifting from the truth of Jesus Christ is far too easy and is the reason we must be rooted in, built up in, and established firmly in the faith.

Our place in Him

In v. 9-10 the apostle Paul writes, “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.” You see, Jesus is the dwelling bodily form of the fullness of Creator God. He is quite literally the fullness of God in our solid reality. I believe one reason behind Paul’s motivation for expressing the full divinity of Jesus Christ is to make certain that the Colossian Christians differentiated between the less divine gods held by other religions and the one true perfect Christian God in Jesus Christ.

When we hold to the belief, either theoretically or in practice, that there are other things on par with the perfect Son Jesus Christ then we're making that thing, person, or ideal an idol. N.T. Wright states, "The man Jesus Christ, now exalted, is not one of a hierarchy of intermediary beings, angelic or (in some sense) 'divine'. He is, uniquely, 'God's presence and his very self.'.... Christ is not a second, differentiated Deity: he is the embodiment and full expression of the one God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Scripture says that it is this God – the one truly divine God – that believers in Christ have been filled with. And friends, the truth for you and I today and for all people past and present is that in one sense Jesus Christ has rivals, but in another He has none. A rival is defined as someone that is competing with another for the same objective or for superiority in the same field of activity. So, with that definition we can say that Satan is Christ's rival. He lies, cheats, steals, and uses whatever means possible to keep people from walking in the freedom Christ offers. But, when all is said and done, our Sovereign Lord has no rivals for all that oppose Him will be destroyed when He fully establishes His just rule and authority on earth.

Forty years ago, in Thief River Falls, Minnesota, fourteen-year-old Larry Lindquist witnessed first-hand what it looks like to be fully submitted to the Lord Jesus Christ when his father stood up over their restaurant table with hands held wide open and publically proclaimed the supremacy of Jesus Christ. Friends, as parents and as brothers and sisters in the Lord this too is our responsibility. Walk in the Lord – be rooted in firmly and built up through the truth of Scripture – and teach one another these same disciplines. The result from our submission to Christ is that we will be more fully able to abound in thanksgiving for the salvation that we've received through Christ and in turn will have a greater desire of devoting ourselves to glorifying the Son of God – the one with whom the deity of God dwells now and forever.

Amen.