Walk in Him
Colossians 2:6-15

I'm sure you've noticed that when a celebrity posts something on social media, or an old post is discovered, and it's bad in some other way, if people turn on them sometimes they'll say something like 'I'm sorry, that post doesn't reflect the kind of person I really am. I'm not really like that. I'm better than that.'

The problem is that what we say, and what we do, inevitably reflects the person we really are when the lights are out. How we live is inextricably linked to the values and virtues we've allowed to shape us. And how you live is always going to be determined by where you're drawing life from.

Walk in Him
Look at v6, 'Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.' Now, so far in this letter, Paul's told us that Jesus is the creator of everything, and the one for whom everything has been made; that he's the perfect image of God and the perfect example of humanity, and that in him are all the riches of wisdom and knowledge. And if you wanted to sum all that up in a couple of words, you couldn't do better than calling Jesus 'the Lord', could you. There's no one greater, no one higher, no one more worthy, or more demanding, of your allegiance, than him.

And in the context of the Roman empire, to call Jesus Lord was a huge statement, because Caesar was the Lord. But when you become a Christian, Paul says, you receive Christ as Lord. And your allegiance has fundamentally shifted. The one you serve, the one whose word you listen to, and whose values and priorities set the tone of your life, has changed. Now, you live under another Lord. And that is going to fundamentally affect the way you live: 'as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.'

In other words, in the way you think and speak and act, at home, at school, at work; in your priorities and ambitions, let the truth that Christ is your Lord shine into every corner of your life: walk in him.

But having talked about walking, Paul immediately switches to talking about being rooted to the spot and set in concrete. And you think, wow, that's a shift in metaphors! Verse 7, 'walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith.' So why go from walking to being rooted? Because like a tree rooted in the ground, where you're drawing your life from, and the foundation your life is built on, will determine how you live.

Think of a hydrangea. Apparently, if you plant a hydrangea in different types of soil, you get different coloured flowers. And life is no different, is it? What your roots are going down into, what you're feeding on, and drawing life and energy from, will determine the colour of your life. And Paul says you're to live as one rooted in Christ.

And he's talking past tense. So if you're a Christian, God has taken you out of the insecure soil of the world, that's always prone to subsidence, and that could never provide you with the security, or identity, you really need, and he's rooted you into Christ. And now he's your ground, he's the one you can draw life from.

He's your strength in the storm to keep you standing; he's your life when the drought comes; he's the one who colours everything about you.

But then Paul switches metaphor again and says, and now, you are being 'built up in him' – present tense. So Christ is the foundation on which you stand, the bedrock that stops you crumbling. And God is steadily building you up on that foundation. Now, maybe you look at your life and think – 'it doesn't feel like the building of my life is progressing very well. Cos I'm still struggling with this sin, or that attitude, and I can't seem to break them.' Or, maybe you recognise that whilst God is working to build you up, through your own bad choices you've been round the other side of the building pulling things down. But listen, neither your feelings, nor your sin puts a halt on God's steadfast work of building you up.

And being rooted and built up in Christ, Paul says you're 'established in the faith.' And when something's established, it's solid. It's not going to crumble, or collapse, or wilt. It endures. And because God has rooted you in Christ, and because he's building you up in Christ, your faith can stand. You can stand in life's earthquakes and life's droughts.

And that will mark your life with something special. You see, much of our western lifestyle is driven by what we *don't* have, isn't it? Advertising tells you – you're life would be so much better if you only bought *this*. Politicians tell you, your life would be so much better, if we were in power instead of them. Social media tells you, all your friends are having a much better life than you. And none of it makes us happy, does it? But when you meet someone who is thankful and grateful for what they *do* have, have you noticed how they're also happier and more at peace than those of us constantly wanting the next thing? And Paul says, that when you understand what you already have in Christ, what God has done and is doing for, you too will, v7, be 'abounding in thanksgiving.' And think how that will colour your life for the better.

The problem is that other stuff tries to lure you away. Look at v8. 'See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit.' In other words, Jesus has his rivals, doesn't he? – rivals for your heart, rivals for where you get your stability or security from, rivals for what most shapes you. And here Paul says that can be philosophy. Now, he doesn't necessarily mean philosophy as we might understand philosophy, that you might study at school or university. In Paul's day any system of thought, or religion was called a philosophy. But what he is saying is that there's a war of ideas going on for how you live your life, and how you see life, and in that conflict don't be taken prisoner.

And the reason for that is that this other stuff on offer is, v8, 'empty deceit.' It's like someone sells you an investment scheme and they promise that this is going to make you fabulously wealthy. So you invest everything you own. All your cash, all your assets, all your pension, and then you wait for it to come to maturity and eventually you get a letter telling you its final value, and it's zero. It's worthless. And Paul is saying that so are these other offers of how you can find meaning in life, or how you can flourish as an individual. Ultimately, they're empty promises.

Plus, v8, they're 'according to human tradition'. And rather than offering you God's grace, and bringing you into relationship with him, this other stuff basically offers you rules; rules for how, if you really try hard enough, you might be able to save yourself. And that could be the Buddha's ancient or 8 fold path, or Peterson's very modern 12 Rules to Life.

But whatever form it takes, Paul says, v8, they are 'according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.' And the word he uses for *elemental spirits* was the word used for the stuff that people thought made up the cosmos, the basic building blocks of earth, water, air and fire. But those things also came to take on a life of their own, and so it came to mean not just the basic principles of life, but the dark powers at work behind the scenes of life.

Now, maybe you look down your nose at such primitive people making gods of those basic elements, but think of what we do with those things we think are the driving forces of our lives, and our 21st century gods of money, sex and power. And Paul is saying, look, don't allow yourself to be taken captive by thinking that that is where you'll find fullness of life, because you won't.

Life is in Him

Verse 9-10, 'For in [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him.' Now, these young Christians are likely coming under influences telling them that if they really want to experience fullness, then they need *this*: some special knowledge, some new experience, some religious practice. But, instead, Paul points them back to Jesus: and all *God's* fullness dwells in him; and in him, they have been filled. And that's how you find real fullness. Not through the latest religious craze, or a list of self-help tips, or in finding the real you – it's in relationship with the one in whom all God's fullness dwells.

Now, imagine someone who has inherited a fortune, and the money is sitting in their bank account. But the person isn't aware, or doesn't believe, that now it belongs to them. And so, instead of living in the good of what they've been given, they think they need to go out and work. And they find a job that works them from dawn to dusk, working their fingers to the bone, just to earn enough to get by. What would you think of such a person? Wouldn't you say to them, 'You don't need to work! All of these riches are already yours! Your bank account is full!' And Paul says, in Christ the same is true for you: the one in whom all of God's fullness dwells, has filled you. So why go looking elsewhere?

You see, look what Paul adds in v10: he says that Jesus is 'the head of all rule and authority.' Now why bring up the issue of power and authority when he's talking about how you thrive and find fullness in life? Because any power structure can become a rival to Christ, can't it? By the very fact that something has power, whether that's economic, or political or religious or academic power you can be tempted to think – well, maybe this has the power to give me the fullness of life I'm looking for. If I make this my Lord, maybe this will give me the identity, the security, the protection I'm looking for. But these things don't have ultimate

power, Paul says, and so you won't find God's fullness in them. God's fullness is in Christ and he's head over every power.

And you find real life in your relationship with him. But before you can experience that life, you have to experience death, you have to experience a cutting off. Look at v11-12: 'In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism.'

Now, amongst all the spiritual influences these guys were coming under, one was probably Jewish teachers telling them, 'look, you can follow Jesus, but if you really want to become a member of God's people, you need to be circumcised'. And another seems to have been people telling them that if they wanted to be really spiritual, to really make the grade, they had to conquer their wrong physical desires, they had to subdue their flesh, through fasting, or some other ascetic practice.

And Paul is saying, no, when you became a Christian, God did both of those for you. He circumcised, not your physical body, but your heart, by filling you with his Spirit and giving you a new heart, and that's what sets you apart as a member of God's people. But when he did so, he also dealt the decisive blow to your sinful nature. He cut you off from your body of flesh, that sphere of sin's influence and control, so now you don't live any longer under that lordship. You're in Christ and under his Lordship.

And Paul says all that happened when you were buried with him in baptism. Now, I became a Christian when I was 17, and on the night I was baptised, an older man called Raj was also baptised. And Raj had become a Christian from a Hindu family. And he said that when he told his family that he had become a Christian, his father said, 'My son is dead'. And he was right, wasn't he? The old Raj had died, cut off from his previous life and his old loyalties. But not so he stayed dead.

You see, when you put your faith in Jesus, you're united with him in his death – his death becomes your death. The old you dies, and you're buried with him in baptism. But Jesus didn't stay dead, and when you're baptised we don't keep you, gasping like a fish, under the water. God raised Jesus from the dead and, v12, 'you were also raised with him.' And if Christ's death was your death, so his resurrection is your resurrection, his new life is the start of your new life.

And Paul says that comes about about, v12, 'through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.' Why faith in the powerful working of God and not just faith in God?

Well, look how he describes your life before you became a Christian, or if you're not yet a Christian, how he describes your life now: v13, 'you were dead in your trespasses.' Now is that a bit extreme? I mean, maybe you hear that and think, dead? Really? I'm not dead, I'm fit, I'm sporty, or you want to see how hard I can party, or my drive to succeed at work is legendary. I'm not dead, I'm very much

alive. And yet, all of those can be true of us, and still we're unresponsive to God, with no spiritual pulse, and we're cold, to him and his people. We're spiritually dead.

And if someone is dead, you need some power to bring them back to life, don't you? When someone has a cardiac arrest the medical team run, they charge up the defibrillator, they put on the paddles, and when the power's at it's peak, they shock them, and the energy released is enough to make the body jump. But if you're spiritually dead you need something much more powerful. You need a power that can raise the dead who have been dead for days and months and years, not just resuscitate someone a few minutes in. You need a power that can bring a cold heart that has spent a lifetime resisting God, back to life.

And only God has that power. And as we put our trust in him to do just that, he unites us with Christ and his resurrection life becomes our new life, and the power of sin and death is broken. Verse 13, 'And you… God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.' So it's not just our spiritual death Jesus turns around, it's our whole problem of sin.

Forgiveness is in Him

Now, when I was a kid, my brother and I were always making each other sign IOUs. If I borrowed ten pence from him to go and buy some sweets and I'd have to write out a note – IOU 10p, signed Martin. And if I failed to cough up, he would come waving it in my face. Now, 10p is nothing, but what's it like to be in real debt? What's it like to be in so much debt that you know there is no hope of ever paying it back? What if you were so in debt that you lived in constant fear of the debt collectors catching up with you? What if you've written an IOU that you can never pay?

Well, that's the image Paul uses for our sin. He describes it in v14, as 'the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.' And we owe God our total allegiance, our everything, but we've failed to pay. And we've known the right things to do, and failed to do them, and the wrong things to do, but still done them. And we're up to our eyes in debt to God and cannot repay.

But here's the difference: God is not like a debt collector, who relentlessly hounds you. He does come for you, but not to make you pay. He comes to pay your debt for you. And in Christ he cancels that IOU, he wipes the slate clean, v14, by 'nailing it to the cross.'

Now, when the Romans crucified someone, they nailed the charge sheet above them: this is the crime that this man is being executed for. So what was the charge sheet nailed above Jesus? 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews'. And that was his crime - that he claimed to be the King of Israel. And to the Jews that made him a blasphemer, and to the Romans, a rebel. But he was neither. But you and I are both. And he died in our place to pay the debt we could never pay. The Son of God perished, that we might be forgiven; the king was crucified so that rebels like us might be pardoned and set free.

Freedom is in Him

Verse 14-15, 'This [record of debt] he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.'

What does it mean to triumph? When England triumphs over France at rugby, or when your favourite sports team triumphs in the league, they've won a great victory, haven't they? But in Paul's day 'to triumph' had an even more specific meaning. A Triumph was a great victory parade given to a general who had returned to Rome having defeated the enemy somewhere. And the crowds would throng the streets. And the general would stand in a chariot, bathed in glory, with the crowd shouting out his praises. And after him would come wagon after wagon, carrying all the plunder of the war: the enemy's swords and spears and armour; wagons piled high with jewellery and statues of the enemy's kings and gods. And then, walking, chained and shamed, came the defeated king and his broken generals. That was what it meant to triumph. That was what it meant to put an enemy to open shame. It was Rome's way of saying, this is how great is our general, this is how great is our power, this is how defeated is our enemy.

And Paul is saying, this is what Christ has done to the rulers and authorities. The civil authority of Rome and the religious powers of Jerusalem, and the dark forces working behind them, stripped Christ naked and put him to open shame at the cross, but it was there, in what seemed his weakest moment, in giving his life for us, that he stripped our enemy of every weapon and disarmed them. And in his resurrection he triumphed over them, forever breaking the power of sin and death, and putting every other power – every dark power, every power that seeks to take you captive, every power you might be afraid of, or think you should yield in allegiance to – he put them all to shame. And says, it's in me that you'll find life and victory and freedom and fullness.

And circumcision, or some new religious practice, or some new religious rule keeping, can never offer you what Christ has already achieved for you. And yes, you're still in a battle – or else why would Paul say 'don't be taken captive'. And yes, your enemy, the devil, still accuses you, reminding you of your guilt and your debt, and yes you'll face times when it seems like you're under a storm of incoming flaming arrows. But you can stand in the day of evil, you can lift up the shield of faith, you can walk in him, because your faith isn't in you, it's in the power of God, and the triumph of Christ.