



THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD

CONTINUE TO LIVE IN HIM

Colossians 2:6-7

January 25, 2008

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Introduction – Hinges

The two verses before us, Colossians 2:6 and 7 are very important verses in this letter to the Colossians and in the life of the Christian as well. They are important verses in the book of Colossians because they serve as a hinge. I have been doing a lot of work in my house recently, taking a few doors off, and I have learned a few things about hinges. They are the things that connect the door to the frame and, therefore, are the transition points between two things. That is what these two verses are in the book of Colossians; they are the hinge of the book.

We see in Colossians the same literary pattern we see in Paul's other letters where he begins the first part of the letter with doctrinal exposition or theology. Then he makes a transition and move on to praxis, or Christian application or living. We see this for example in Romans chapters 1-11 where there is a magnificent exposition of the doctrines of the faith. Then in Romans chapters 12 to 15 and a half we see Christian application. Then for the transition are two verses, Romans 12:1-2. They are the transition, the hinge of the book of Romans connecting the doctrinal and the practical part. "Therefore . . . in view of God's mercy" that is in the previous eleven chapters, now offer your bodies as living sacrifices—that's the key principle—and then he expounds on it in the next four chapters.

Paul does the same thing in Ephesians; chapters 1-3 are the exposition of doctrine and chapters 4-6 are Christian application or Christian living. And the hinge is right there in chapter 4:1, "As a prisoner for the Lord, then I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." That's the hinge in the book of Ephesians.

Paul does it in 1 Thessalonians as well. Chapters 1-3 are an extended thanksgiving or you might say a kind of exposition. And then chapters 4 and 5 are application; the hinge there is in 4:1, "Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God . . . Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more."

Colossians 2:6-7 is a kind of hinge in this book. That's why it has made "banner status." Colossians 1:18 really captures the theological vision of the book—the supremacy of Jesus Christ over all things. What is the hinge, the crux or message of the letter? It is right here in verse 6, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him." It's the hinge of the book. Here we also find the first imperative of the book, the first expressive command of the book. We are going to see a number of other commandments as we continue to work through chapter 2. From chapter 3 through chapter 4:6 he closes off the practical living section of Colossians, so to speak.

So these are important verses because they are the hinge and also because they are the heart of the letter; that is, these two verses animate the rest of what Paul is going to say. They underscore a key principle that suffuses itself in the rest of what Paul says in this letter. We'll see this as he goes through the letter how he unfolds and relates with chapter 2:6-7.

Right at the heart of these two verses is the call, the exhortation to “continue to live in him.” That is the leading exhortation of the letter. What is this message and call of the letter of Colossians? It is to *continue to live in him*. This may echo the verse in chapter 1:21-23 which talked about the Mt. Everest of Christian living and the necessity of persevering in the faith. There we found out how we were alienated from God but God has done something in Christ to reconcile us to himself. And he is preparing us to be found on the Day of Judgment spotless, faultless and above reproach, free of accusation. But in verse 23 is that big “if”—“if you continue in your faith.”

An Analogy – Continue by Doing What We Did in Conversion

So chapter 2:6 is an echo of that verse but more than that, Paul wants to underscore and press home this point about continuing in Christ. He does so in two ways. The first way is an *analogy* that helps us understand what it means to continue in Christ. In the second way he gives some *descriptions* of what continuing in Christ ought to look like, or how it is that we continue on in Christ.

The analogy we see in verse 6 and the description we see in verse 7. First, in the analogy he elaborates on what it means to continue on in Christ. He doesn’t have to reach very far to explain what it look like to continue in Christ. It is interesting that the analogy he reaches for is close at hand, and it is the experience of conversion. You see in verse 6, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord,”—that’s the parallel, the analogy he has drawn—so also, “continue to live in him.” Conversion is the analogy for understanding continuing in faith. And friends, it underscores a *vital* point when it comes to Christian living and it is this—there is a continuity between how it is we begin the Christian life and how we continue on *in* the Christian life. You don’t want to miss that point; it’s the main thrust of this passage and it helps us to understand the rest of the letter.

There is a *fundamental continuity* between how you became a Christian and how you continue on as a Christian. It is so important because of the subtle temptation that I think we all experience as Christians and that you see in the history of the Church: the subtle temptation to think that somehow continuing on in the Christian life is a different kind of thing than what it took to become a Christian.

We are all tempted to think, from time to time when the going gets tough after we become Christians and we experience hardships, challenges, disappointments, “Maybe I need to be doing something different than that simple embrace of Jesus that I did when I got saved.” We think, “There must be something that I’m missing here.” So we begin scratching around for that key spiritual insight into getting on in the life of discipleship: there must be some key to Christian living that I have not yet; there must be some Bible-study that is really hot and sexy and I’ve got to study it, and that will unleash my Christian living because what I have been doing is not panning out like I hoped. That’s a subtle temptation for all of us as it was for some of Paul’s churches. In Galatians for example where Paul celebrates how well the Galatians did when they embraced him. He says to them in chapter 4 that “you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God,” you were ready to rip out an eye on my behalf—that’s how well you embraced me. You got off to such a great start. But of course by the time Paul needs to write the letter, they are not doing so well.

So Paul writes this long extended letter which is essentially a rebuke. Look at the beginning of chapter 3: “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” What’s happened to you? Then he asked them this one rhetorical question which is decisive for the whole situation in Galatians, in chapter 3:2. He said, “I just have one question I want to ask you and if you answer this question, it will settle the whole issue at stake in Galatians. Here is the one question: When you became a Christian, did you receive the Holy Spirit by the hearing of faith or by the works of the Law? If you answer that question the case is closed. Tell me how you became a Christian.” What is Paul assuming? He is assuming a *fundamental continuity between how you become a Christian and how you continue on in the Christian life*. So he says in the very next verse, verse 3: Are you so foolish, Galatians, having begun by the Spirit, are you now seeking perfection, seeking to be completed by means of “human effort” or through the flesh? He is pressing home this point; he knows that we are tempted to think there is a fundamental *discontinuity* between coming to Christ and continuing on in Christ. Of course the false teachers who came into the Galatia were saying just that thing! They were saying: Yes, fair and well. Embrace Jesus and get converted and get saved; but if you really want to continue on in the Christian life, you have got to do a few other things. Paul presses against that, underscoring this fundamental continuity between conversion and continuing in the Christian life.

Now the Colossians were struggling with an issue quite similar to what the Galatians were struggling with. The Colossians evidently had come under the persuasion of some who were teaching something similar: that getting saved and embracing Jesus is all fine and well but if you really want to press on in the Christian life you’ve got to do some other stuff. We will see when we get to verse 2:8. Paul had to rebuke that stuff straight away.

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

It is the fundamental issue he is going to unpack with the Colossians. They have fallen into that subtle temptation of thinking there is a discontinuity in the way you begin and the way you continue in the Christian life. But here is the liberating realization: that just as you come to Christ by receiving him as Lord, so also you continue in him. What God is calling us to in the Christian life is not something different than or other than what it was that brought us to Christ in the first place: Faith, receiving Christ Jesus as Lord. And we are to do that simply in the Christian life, if you put it this way, over and over and over again.

Two summers ago my family and I went to Breckenridge, Colorado with my wife’s parents and brother. On one sunny Breckenridge day, my brother-in-law who is an avid bike-rider had a grand idea: why don’t we bike from Breckenridge to Vail, all 74.6 miles of it! I thought I’m a pretty athletic guy and I know how to ride a bike; I think I can do that. I had to first rent a bike, one of those fancy road bikes with shoes I had never worn that you clip in cannot get out unless you do some fancy thing with your feet. So we hopped on our bikes, take the first pedal out of the garage and then down through the town of Breckenridge onto the trail that takes you several miles down into Frisco. Then you turn and make your way up Highway 6 up to Copper Mountain and through the Wheeler Junction, and then up, up, up, up, up the Vail Pass!

It is a seriously steep grade on a bicycle. You can tell it’s steep because you keep zigzagging back and forth up the pass as you go, and then down the other side into the Vail ski resort—all 74.6 miles of it! Well, here was the liberating realization as I came away from that bike trail.

The same thing that got me out of the garage was the same thing that got me up the Vail Pass and down the other side into the ski resort 75 miles later. It was this—pedaling! Yes, on the bike trail, the scenery changed; the grade on the path changed; my emotional disposition towards biking changed; I felt different; it was harder at points; it was easier at points. But at the end of the day it was the exact same act that got me out of the garage and up the Pass, down the to the ski resort—pedaling over and over and over again.

That, friends, is the way to conceive of the Christian life. Just as you came to Christ Jesus, so you do that same act over and over and over again. The circumstances of your life may change; it might get more challenging; you might feel different about your life and how it's going but the bottom line is—and this should be a liberating realization—it is the same act of pedaling your faith motion after motion, day after day, hour after hour, week after week, from where you are today till when you go to be with Jesus—the same act. There is a fundamental continuity in the Christian life. And that is what Paul is driving at in verse 6, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him.” Do not do some weird new thing. You continue on pedaling! And what does it mean to pedal in the Christian life? How was it that we received Christ Jesus when we were converted? We received Christ Jesus by embracing him, as Paul says, as Lord.

Nature of Continuity – Receiving Christ Jesus *as Lord*

If you are a Christian here today and you have been converted, that's what you did in one way, shape or another. You embraced Jesus Christ as Lord, that is, *you embraced his supremacy over your life*. You gave him in that act of conversion, that first act of faith, supremacy over your life; you acknowledged his authority over your life. You also gave him sufficiency *in your life*. You said: Jesus you are sufficient, and looked to him as provision; he is the all-sufficient provision that we need. So you said of Jesus, You are supreme as Lord and you are sufficient—a Lord. And that is what it means to become a Christian; you acknowledge that is what happened in your heart and in your life.

The challenge, if I can put it this way, is that God does not bring us home right after we are converted. He calls us to continue on to live *in Christ*. Most of us will know from our own experience that when the dust of conversion settles and a new day dawns, like the next day, you realize: I did not know my life was so complicated. It is this way with lots of big decisions in life. You make a big decision and what do you want to do the day after you made it? You want to start taking some ground back! It is like you drive a stake in the ground, I am going to do this and the next morning when you wake up, you say maybe I will just do eighty-five percent. You start taking a little ground back. Well, the call of this passage is to not take the ground back; that you continue on making Jesus Christ the Lord of all your life. Or think of it this way: just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord as an act of faith, so too, day by day by day by day, regardless of the circumstances of your life or what God brings into your life, the call on your life as a Christian is to continue receiving Christ Jesus as Lord.

So you bump up against some challenge at work and you say to yourself: How should I continue to live in Christ? Answer: continue to receive him as Lord. And what does that mean? Recognize his supremacy and authority, and lean into him as all sufficient who will provide *everything* you need. That is what it means to continue to live in him. I encourage you to take

the phrase “as Lord” in the first part of verse 6 and with a pencil write at the end of verse 6 “as Lord.” Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him *as Lord*.

Is Jesus like a house? Can you go inside and live in him? Or, as Paul literally puts it, “walking in him” like he is a park? What is he getting at here? What he is underscoring is the supremacy and authority of Jesus *over* our lives and the sufficiency and provision of Jesus *in* our lives. We are to hide ourselves *within* the realm of his authority and supremacy and sufficiency and provision and live there and not elsewhere.

So, this is what Paul is driving at here; the analogy of conversion with continuing on in the Christian life. That the way we began is the way we continue in the Christian life—continuing to receive Christ Jesus and making him Lord of our lives. Let me give one practical application of what this looks like. It comes from Colossians and has to do with getting along with people who rather irritate you. How is it you bear up with people who bother you? Or more importantly, how do you forgive people who have wronged you? All of us have that in our lives, where we need to continue to live as a Christian by bearing up with prickly, annoying people and by forgiving people who have wronged us. See what Paul says in Colossians 3:13. As I said, chapter 2:6 is the heartbeat that animates what he is going to say by way of instruction, teaching and application. We see it comes to the surface here in 3:13 where he is talking about getting on with prickly people.

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Do you see the call to continue on in the Christian life as a person who forgives, embracing the forgiveness you received at conversion? Just as you embraced the forgiveness Jesus Christ offered you as your all-sufficient provision and source of life, just as you grabbed hold of that in conversion, so you continue to live in him as the forgiving and all-sufficient Lord of your life, embracing his forgiveness afresh day by day, which will in turn make *us* forgiving people. We *need* to be this way. We all bump into prickly people and live with people that we would just as soon not live with on a day to day basis. Let us be honest: we probably have people in our church that are prickly to us. The reality is some of you are probably prickly to other people in this church. But we need to be bearing with each other and forgiving each other. The way to do that is to embrace day by day the forgiveness God extends to us, and then be ready to extend it to other people. So that is chapter 2:6; that is the analogy Paul uses to underscore continuing in Christ.

Three Descriptions – We Continue by being Grounded, Growing and Grateful

Now for the descriptions: three descriptions and I have alliterated them—Grounded, Growing and Gratitude. This is what we find in verse 7. You find *grounded* in the first word of verse 7: rooted. We “continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him.” You may recognize I am talking about *grounded*, which is a building metaphor and Paul uses “rooted” which is a horticultural plant metaphor. I am taking a little license here to mix metaphors as Paul does in his very next breath, “rooted and built up in him.” So how do we continue in Christ? We’ve got to be rooted: rooted in the embrace of the gospel by faith, and rooted in the love of God. We have a deep, profound, existentialist experience and awareness of the love of God in Jesus Christ for us. We see Paul praying for the Ephesians in chapter 3:17 where he says, “being rooted and established in love” I pray “that you may power with all the saints, to grasp how

wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.” So we need to be rooted in the gospel and rooted in a profound understanding of the love of God. That is essential for continuing on in the Christian life.

Let me pause here and say quite candidly to some that you may have difficulty continuing on because you have never been properly rooted in the Christian life. Think of Jesus’ Parable of the Sower. Now Jesus says to the crowd and to his disciples that the kingdom of God is preached, and it is like the casting of seed out in the world as the gospel goes forth. It lands on different sorts of grounds. One of the grounds it lands on is a rocky place and, Jesus says, when the seed lands there it springs up quickly and is received with joy. There is a quick springing in action and a quick response and there is joyfulness! But remember what Jesus says as well: but when the sun comes up and the scorching heat is bearing down on it, it withers away and dies. He explains to his disciples and says that the sun coming up and the scorching heat is persecution and suffering. The folks who receive it with joy and quick response are without root, and thus the pressure or persecution causes it to wither away and fall quickly away. That is a challenge and exhortation to self-examination for some of you—if you are finding continuing on in the Christian life is a challenge to ask yourself: Have I really been properly rooted in the gospel and properly rooted in the love of God?

The second description is Growth. Two little pictures here: we are rooted and built up in him—that is the first piece of Growth—and strengthened in the faith as you were taught. That is the second piece. In order to continue on in Christ, we need to be built up in him. How is it that we are built up in him, matured, as it were? We think of where Paul uses the *built up* language elsewhere in his letters in 1 Corinthians where we find that it is exposure to the gifts of the body of Christ that encourages or enables us to be built up in him. Paul says this most fabulous thing in 1 Corinthians 12:7, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good,”—for the building up of the body. Do you ever feel like that as a Christian? When you come to church on a Sunday morning, did you ever think of it that way? — I’m coming to church with God’s presence ready to be manifest to other people for their good, for the building up of them. I have the manifestation of the presence of God’s spirit in my life. And as I exercise my gifts in the various forms of encouragement, or a word of prophecy or help, or whatever it is, the Holy Spirit himself appears to other people and blesses them and builds them up.

Now that’s a reason to come to church in the morning! That’s exciting! Do not see yourself chilling out as a church consumer. You are coming with the presence of God, to manifest the presence of God for the benefit and the building up of the rest of this body, whether you are in high school or in the sanctuary or in an ABF, or in a Lifegroup, or whatever the form it takes. We need to be exposing ourselves to the very gifts of the body. There is no place in the Christian life for solo artists. You will not continue in the faith if you run in isolation. You cannot survive that way! You *must* be around other people who can build you up by being blessed by their gifts.

The second part of growth is being strengthened in the faith as you were taught. If being built up is about getting exposure to the very gifts of the body, then being strengthened in the faith as you were taught is getting exposure to solid, substantive biblical teaching. Hear the pulpit ministry, be in adult bible fellowships, Lifegroups, small groups, men’s groups, women’s groups, devotional reading habits, a variety of different ways in which you can be strengthened in the faith as you were taught. The key is to expose yourself to a steady diet of substantive

biblical teaching, not just learning but *living* biblical teaching. As we live we can reflect upon what it is that we have learned. It has a wonderful mutually reinforcing effect in our lives. Thus it is life working out; you get strengthened in the faith as you exercise faith and learn about the faith, and reflect on the faith further, you are being strengthened in the faith. So that is the second thing Paul is talking about here in terms of the continuing on in Christ, growth.

Grounding, Growth and the third, Gratitude. We have already seen in Colossians how gratitude is essential to the Christian life. Do you remember the profile of the fully pleasing person from chapter 1:10-12? We saw there that gratitude was an essential part of the Christian life. We see the profile of the fully pleasing life: one who is “joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.” Gratitude is *essential* in the Christian life. But why does Paul bring gratitude in at this point in connection with continuing on in the Christian life? What is the idea there? How does gratitude relate with continuing on in the Christian life?

When I was an undergraduate student I did an internship with a pastor at a church in Indianapolis. I remember having lunch with him and he asked me, “Have you ever changed your mind or your views about the Bible, God or theology?” And I said, “Yeah, I think I have changed my mind on a few things.” He quickly said to me, “Why did you change your mind?” My naïve response was because I am in college, reading books and taking classes and sharpening my understanding but I knew he was probing for something a little more subtle and profound. Then he answered the question for me. He said, “Disillusionment.”

Disillusionment is the reason why people change their minds. Disappointment leads to disillusionment, and disillusionment can lead to deviation. Think about how that works. You bring to God certain expectations; or you bring to the Christian faith certain expectations; or you bring to the church certain expectations; or you bring to your own Christian life certain expectations. Then when the rough and tumble of life does not match up with the expectations, what happens in your heart? Disappointment! And disappointment is fine; all of us have to deal with disappointment at one point or another, and if we live long enough, lots of times. But if disappointment is not dealt with it starts to fester. It is like a glass of milk left out on the counter top that starts to get really funky when the sun gets on it. Disappointment can lead to disillusionment.

All of us know what I am talking about because you have been around people who are disillusioned with God or themselves, and not least, the church. You can hear it, see it, smell it; there is a sort of sour-milk-disillusionment to everything about them because they have not dealt with the disappointment. And if that goes on long enough, the disillusionment will lead to *deviation from the faith!* Next, if that goes on too long and gets aggressive, there will be a *dismantling of the faith.* I just read about a guy, a Moody grad, Wheaton grad, Princeton seminary guy, who is *long gone* from the faith—not just disaffected and disillusioned with the faith, one of the brightest New Testament scholar working in the field today—but now dismantling the faith. He has just written a very interesting book, one of many books, a recent publication on the problem of Evil. You can anticipate what he is going to say: This is the heart of my spiritual pilgrimage, he says in the introduction, being disappointed with the Christian account of the problem of Evil and Suffering in the world—which leads to disillusionment, which leads to disaffection, which leads to deviation, and now, he is dismantling the Christian faith.

So do you see why Paul brings in gratitude in here as an essential means by which we can continue on in the faith? Gratitude, friends, is a great preservative. It is a great preservative in human relationships. A husband does not deviate from his wife if he is grateful for her in an overflowing sort of way. Husbands leave their wives when they are disappointed with them. Then the wives get disillusioned with the husbands because they have to hang out with these disappointing bums, and next they deviate into dodgy stuff. As a former pastor of mine used to say, "Guard yourself with gratitude." If you want to continue on in the Christian life, marriage, parenting or anything, guard yourself with gratitude. Keep an eye on your heart. If your gratitude begins to slip, watch out! You yourself may begin to slip.

So, guard yourself with gratitude. Be grounded in the love of God. Grow by being with other believers who build you up. Sit under teaching that is substantive and thoughtful so that you are strengthened in the faith. And guard yourself with gratitude so that you are, as Paul says, like a cup "overflowing with thankfulness." It is *the key* in continuing to live the Christian life.

It is fun sometimes to get another person's Bible and use it for a little while. Have you ever done that? That would be a great Lifegroup exercise—swap Bibles for a week and see what is going on in another person's heart and mind as they are reading the Scriptures. It is quite exciting and encouraging to see. Dear Pastor Howard, who loaned me his Bible, underlined two passages in Colossians using his bright, orange, fluorescent highlighter. One passage is Colossians 3:16,

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

The other passage underlined, indeed with the same bright highlighter, is Colossians 2: 6-7 because Pastor Howard is a good Bible reader. He knows this is the hinge and heart of the letter. And so I hope you do now as well—and more importantly, as the hinge of the Christian life, conversion to continuing on and as the heart of the Christian life. There is a fundamental continuity between how you begin and how you finish in the Christian life. The last thing I want to point out about Pastor Howard's Bible is there is only one word in Colossians that has a double orange underscore, the word "overflowing" from verse 7—overflowing with thankfulness. May that be characteristic and true of Calvary Memorial Church as a people and of you as individuals—overflowing with thankfulness as we continue on in the faith, receiving Christ Jesus as Lord just as you received him for the very first time.

Amen.