

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.

In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

1. Keep growing in Christ (vss 6-7)
2. Keep listening to Christ (beware other voices) (vss 8-10)
3. Remember God & others got you started on your journey (vss 11-12)
4. Remember God delivered you from sin, from death to life (vss 13-15)

INTRODUCTION (Vaughan Roberts)

An American hillbilly family in the 1930's was driving across country and stopped in a mid-western city. Saw a fancy hotel. So dad and the son went in to look and were amazed. Saw this strange cubicle over at one end of the lobby. A door opened and an old lady tottered through the door and into the cubicle. She seemed to push a button, the door closed and she disappeared. After a few minutes the door opened and out came a young woman of stunning beauty. The man and his son stared with wide eyes and open mouths. Then the dad said to the son, "*Son, quick, go outside and bring your mom in here!*"

Have you ever wished that there was some kind of transformation machine that you could enter for a few minutes and then come out looking *younger, leaner, stronger, tanned*—actually, I think there is one for *tanning!*

So what if there was a magic "**discipleship**" machine? In only moments it could transform your *inner* life--change you into a more generous, servant-minded, holy, humble, loving, patient, joyful, peaceful, kind person. You know, you could become more like Jesus--instantly! Great, yes? You do aspire to be more Christ-like, don't you?

That's one definition of a *disciple*. A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ who follows in order to be more like him. To follow him is to imitate him. To think with the mind of Christ. To serve with the humility of Christ. To be conformed to his image (in a word, to be *Christ-like*). E.g. Charles Sheldon's classic, *In His Steps* (what would Jesus do?).

And a disciple is a learner—someone who takes seriously Jesus' words: "*Take my yoke upon you and learn of me.*" If you are a Christian you automatically are enrolled in the *School of Christian Living* and you, by definition, are engaged in *Continual Life-long learning*.

Example: Continuing Education (we all have more to learn)

A disciple is on a journey; you cannot arrive instantly, when taking a trip you follow some kind of road with twists and turns—and the scenic route, I think, is the best one to take. That is, be open to learning on the back roads in out of the way places; and learning from people you had never thought of before as your mentors and teachers.

Example: learning from Leo, Klaus (T. Charles-Edwards, Paul Fiddes)

Colossians 2 offers us Paul's advice that "just as we have received Christ, so we ought to continue to live our lives in Him" reminds us all that we have not arrived yet and we have not figured out all the dimensions of kingdom living yet... We will return to this admonition in a few moments.

But before you can **continue** something you must first **begin**. You have to start your journey and how do you do that—in the arena of Christian discipleship how do you get started? BTW, I'm going to talk to our **confirmands** for a moment—you can listen in! Today is a starting day of sorts for our **confirmands**. Of course *baptism* is a starting point as well. I think one of you is being baptized today—so this really is *your* start-of-the-race day.

So how do you *begin* as a disciple? Is it a matter of *believing* certain things? Is it making promises and commitments by answering questions in the midst of public worship and before elders? Yes indeed. And we are coming to the "public part" soon.

But I'm going to ask the "beginning" question a second time in terms of this Colossians passage. When the apostle Paul wrote, "*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord,*" what did he have in mind? Was he thinking of persons taking a class and answering questions or do you think he envisioned something else?

Of course St Paul's era was The VERY BEGINNING of the Christian Church—2000 years ago. So maybe *catechesis* (preparing people to learn and join the church) took a different form. Then again, maybe Paul is referring to something different altogether. Is it possible that Paul is thinking about people having a kind of coming-to-faith-in-Jesus **experience**?

If we think that discipleship is mostly something we do (*we* believe, *we* make a decision, *we* learn, *we* follow) then we miss something both basic and essential. Being a Christian is a work of the Spirit that God does in us. God calls and we answer. He loves us and we love in return. He speaks and we listen. If we emphasize our responding and our answering too

much we might make the mistake of thinking this Christian faith business is all about my choosing and my traveling a certain road.

That's what the apostle Paul thought when he used to be called Saul and traveled the road to Damascus. He was a Pharisee, a religious zealot intent on punishing heretics (Christian). He was obsessed with learning the law of Moses and performing it. I think he was well meaning in his days of Jewish discipleship. And then he had an **experience**. He met Jesus Christ and the Lord put him on a new road.

So what might that experience look like?

Example: ST PATRICK

One's discipleship journey includes experiences and disciplines; one can stimulate the other and they should do so!

Example: my early faith experience involved *learning to pray* and then *reading the bible* in a new way during my college years.

Today I want to congratulate you for the time and effort you (confirmands) have made to consider seriously Christian faith and church membership. And I'm delighted that you are ready and willing to confess your faith in Christ publicly, here, today. You know, don't you, that there are places in the world where people cannot make such a public profession of faith without risking life, liberty, belonging to one's family and so on. Muslim background believers and Hindu background believers and members of underground churches pay a cost for their faith we know little about.

So our freedom to become disciples and to grow as disciples is a liberty we must cherish and safeguard. Thank you Thomas Jefferson for your good work enabling Virginians to recognize and to protect religious liberty!

Let's conclude with one more mention of our NT lesson from Colossians. Here is the key verse.

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him,⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

The word "*rooted*" is a clue that informs us what kind of metaphor Paul is using. He is thinking about agriculture, isn't he? Plants and trees have roots right? And disciples must be rooted or anchored in Christ if they are Christian disciples. If you were a Buddhist disciple you would be rooted in the Buddha. And if you were an atheist disciple you might be rooted in the works of Nietzsche or Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens...

Paul takes it for granted that his Colossian readers are rooted in Christ. He believes they have begun their discipleship journeys and he urges them to keep going in their relationships with Christ. He wants them to be fruitful (blessed by God and thus a blessing to others).

Suppose you plant a tomato plant in your yard. What if it stops growing--then you would conclude what? We think our tomato plants should grow tall and eventually need a stake or a cage to support all the growth of leaves and fruit. And yes it eventually should produce tomatoes, right? Little green ones, then bigger ones, then they ripen and become yellow and finally red. Then you harvest that wonderful *fruit*. Why would you grow a tomato plant if you did not expect to gain tomatoes from it?

Why would you start a journey of discipleship unless you believed living like a disciple would yield good results? It will yield good results. Following Jesus will make all the difference in your life. Yes, you must receive Jesus Christ as Lord, then you must continue in Him. But if you do your life will produce the fruit of the Spirit. Believe me; Believe the scriptures.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Christ be with me,
Christ within me,
Christ behind me,
Christ before me,
Christ beside me,
Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ in quiet,
Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself the name,
The strong name of the Trinity;
By invocation of the same.
The Three in One, and One in Three,
Of whom all nature hath creation,
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:
Praise to the Lord of my salvation,
salvation is of Christ the Lord.