

**Big idea:** Paul's readers are under the Lordship of Jesus – they must walk like this.

**FCF:** Taking our identity and, thus, our life as believers for granted.

**Application:** Walk in him!

I want to just set out what we are doing over the next three sermons. In reality, Colossians 2:6-23 is one section – the whole section deals with doubt that has emerged amongst the Colossians, through the work of false teachers, about the sufficiency of the Lordship of Jesus. The argument is very clear, but the content is very dense. Colossians 2:6-7 is the key principle of the letter. Paul sets that out first, reminding the Colossians of who they are and what they must do. Then, in verses 8-15 and 16-23 he deals with the doubts that have been raised about the Lordship of Jesus. On the one hand, he sets out the facts about the identity of the Colossian Christians in verses 8-15, which undermines any doubt about what they have received in the Lordship of Jesus. On the other hand, he deals with the many attempts that people make to deal with their doubts about Jesus' sufficiency with extra activity in verses 16-23. The whole section is dealing with the doubts about the sufficiency of Jesus as Lord.

Today, I just want to deal with verses 6-7. I want to deal with them as the key principle for the letter. I also want to use this key principle to encourage us to think more deeply about our identity and its foundation for our behaviour.

## PRAY...

### **1. Identity and behaviour**

I wonder if you have spent much time thinking about who you are and how that dictates what you do. I don't mean, at this point, on any deep and metaphysical level – I mean, just at the very basic. I am a male, therefore I... I am a female, therefore I... I am a student, therefore... I am a farmer, therefore I... I am a husband/wife, therefore I... I am a father/mother, therefore I... I am an Australian, therefore I...

You see, whether we like it or not, there is an inevitable connection between who we are and what we do: our identity is the foundation for our behaviour – who we are sets what we do. Most of that comes naturally to us – we kind of have a grasp on what it means to be a father, and the actions that involves.

But, I wonder if we think deeply about our identity as Christians. You see, when I say, 'I am a Christian, therefore I...', what ideas immediately spring to your mind? When was the last time that you thought hard – I mean hard and deeply – about your identity as a Christian? This identity – Christian – is not just limited one specific field of behaviour – it influences all my behaviour. 'I am a Christian' is an identity that changes every other identity label we have. Put another way, if I have changed postcodes, that changes who I am and what I do.

## **2. 'Therefore'**

Paul has now finished the introduction to his letter. He has laid the foundation. Now, he turns to his major concern – **look at verses 6-7... READ.**

'Therefore' should turn our minds back to everything that Paul has said. At the heart of that is the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord of all things. This truth has radically transformed those who have become Christians in Colossae. At the heart of this Lordship is this truth: Jesus is our Lord ('boss') because he has brought us peace with God by dying for our sins. That is what it means to be a Christian: Jesus is our Lord because he brought us peace with God. This is Paul's message. This is at the heart of who the Colossians are. This is at the heart of Paul's prayer and concern for them.

'Therefore' must also turn our minds back to the immediate context – the verses that come just before. Here Paul has made clear his chief concern: he does not want his fellow believers in Colossae to be 'deceived' by 'persuasive arguments'. This, now, becomes Paul's focus because, although he is absent physically, his desire for the souls and lives of these fellow-believers is strong. He wants to strengthen them as they face these 'persuasive arguments'. And so he turns to deal with that issue now, in the main part of the letter.

## **3. You have received Christ Jesus the Lord... (2:6-7)**

Listen again to Paul's key response to this danger – **look at verses 6-7... READ.**

Paul begins his exhortation to these readers with an affirmation of their identity, and the behaviour that emerges from who they are. His key principle is to remind them of their identity and the resultant behaviour.

It is a typical Paul method; in fact, every one of Paul's pastoral letters works along these lines. He sets out the identity of his readers – an identity always found in God's work through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – and then he looks at what this means for their behaviour. The technical term is the indicative and the imperative – literally, 'who you are' and 'what to do'. Here, he does the same in two verses, but it mirrors the structure of the letter as a whole. The first two chapters, largely, deal with their identity; the second two chapters deal with their lives.

The identity of the Colossian Christians is there in **verse 6** – they have 'received Christ Jesus as Lord'.

We need to be careful at this point that we do not immediately assume Paul means what we mean when we use 'received Christ Jesus as Lord'. When Paul uses the term 'received', he is using a technical term to describe the transfer of a block of truth/knowledge. Thus, the Colossians were given the message that Christ Jesus is the Lord – this is behind the phrase 'the faith' a little further on – 'the repository of knowledge that has been handed down, about who Jesus is. That is, they received the truth that:

- Jesus is the Lord of all things, as we saw in Colossians 1:15-20.

- Jesus' Lordship has its fullest expression in the peace he wins for sinful humans on the cross.
- Jesus' Lordship is established in his winning forgiveness for sinners, buying them out of the rule of Satan.
- Jesus' Lordship is the truthful expression of God's grace (1:6).
- Jesus' Lordship brings the hope of heaven (1:5)

That is some evangelistic message, isn't it? But this is what they received from Epaphras.

This is the body of teaching – the truth – which is described as 'the faith'. And, in this truth, they put their faith – they received the truth, and they received it personally, and it changed them. Thus, their identity is to be found in the Lordship of Jesus.

What does that mean?

If you trawl back through the opening chapter and a half, you begin to realise that the Lordship of Jesus lays out a significant identity for these people – and all Christians:

- These people are recipients of God's grace – he has placed upon them mercy they do not deserve, instead of judgement (1:6).
- These people have an inheritance that is eternal life in heaven (1:5, 12)
- These people have changed their address from the 'domain of darkness' to the 'kingdom of the Son' (1:13).

- These people have been ‘redeemed’ – bought at a significant and costly price, given freedom at a large expense (1:14).
- These people have had their ‘sins forgiven’ (1:14), which means that, by the life/death/resurrection of Jesus, they have ‘peace with God’ (1:20).
- These people have moved from being the hostile enemies of God to being ‘reconciled’ to God (1:21-22).
- These people have moved from being ‘alienated from God’ to being able to be ‘presented to God, without blemish and perfect (1:21-22)
- These people have all the knowledge and wisdom they need to deal with life appropriately because Jesus is their Lord, and he lives in/with them (2:3).

#### **4. ... walk in him (2:6-7)**

The action that results from this – the imperative – is put very simply by Paul – **look at verse 6... READ.**

Paul knows that the use of ‘walk’ conjures up an image in people’s minds. The way a person walks tells us a lot about them; in fact, our walks reveal who we are. Think of a shearer, a soldier, a horseman, an NRL player – how we walk is unique, and it reveals who we are. It is not surprising then, that ‘walking’ is one of Paul’s favourite images for the life of a believer.

Christians should ‘walk’ as if Jesus is their boss. It reveals their identity. It must be ‘in him’. That is, his Lordship dictates their life so much that it is indistinguishable from the one who is their Lord.

In case we missed the significance and meaning of this, Paul unpacks it for us in four terms. The terms are interesting in themselves – the first ('rooted') is the only one in the past, with the others all being in the present; the first three terms ('rooted', 'built up' and 'established') are all things done to Christians, by God, through Jesus, whilst only the fourth is something that Christians do; the terms speak of an inevitable growth as Christians, and we could go on.

As we begin to look at these four terms, I want us to notice that this walking is inseparable from the identity that Christians have – the walk is 'in him', the roots and building are 'in him', the growth in the Christian life is 'in the faith as you were taught'. The whole growth and life of the Christian can be summed up as being 'in him' – as being with Jesus as Lord. In fact, do you see how this encompasses everything – there is no compartmentalising of life as a Christian – the whole walk is 'in him' – he is Lord over it all? The identity as Christian is the identity that Jesus is Lord, and that is over all – from what you read to what you think, from how you conduct your job to what you say at home, from how you parent to how you organise your finances, from what you desire to what you avoid, from who you know to what you do – it is all 'in him'.

Now, to those terms:

- 'rooted and built up in him': One of the great truths of gardening is that the soil must fuel the plant. Once you have planted something in the right soil and it is flourishing, you are a fool to move it. The starting point of the Christian life is the soil for the rest of the Christian life: the Lordship

of Jesus. You see, this is where the identity of the Christian begins – it is what moves them from enemy of God to child of God. This planting was by God, and it is an established fact – something that happened to these people, by God. In that soil – the ‘Lordship of Jesus’ – these plants are to grow. And, again, God himself will do that through the means he has established – in this case the truths about Jesus as Lord that have been taught.

- ‘established in the faith, as you were taught’: the great truth that has been revealed to the Colossians – and all Christians – is that we can have peace with God through Jesus. That is worth thinking upon. The truth that has been handed to us – the Lordship of Jesus – is something that we must study, delve into, meditate upon and consider for the rest of our lives. If we are to be familiar with the Lordship of Jesus so that we can submit to his Lordship in all areas of our walking, we must know what it is, what it means. Let me ask you: What does it mean for Jesus to be the Christ? What does it mean for him to have the ‘fullness of God in him’? What does it mean for him to be ‘firstborn over all creation’? What does the ‘will of God’ look like? What does ‘the church’ look like? What is ‘the church’? You see, these are ‘the faith’, and to be established in it so that we can walk in it means we must know it. Notice, here, that Paul is not talking to the minister of the church, the vicar, the theologian or the academic – he is talking to all of us as people who sit in the pew and then go out to walk as children and parents and students and teachers and husbands and wives and farmers and grandparents and retired...

- 'overflowing with thankfulness': here is the response to delving into these depths, for sending roots further down, for having our lives built up – gratitude and thankfulness. You see, because Jesus is Lord, and we are in his kingdom, then the walk may be tough, but the identity never fades nor is removed by the world. It has been granted by grace, it is sustained by God's strength, and it is never adjusted, damaged or removed by the world. The walk may feel like it is through molasses and uphill into a strong wind, but the identity remains immovable.

## **5. Walk this way!**

Paul is about to start dealing with the danger that the Colossians face – the false teaching that casts doubts over the Lordship of Jesus. Before he does, he wants to ram home this key principle: you have received Jesus as Lord – so walk like it! The Lordship of Jesus is sufficient!

He makes clear what all of us do unconsciously: our identity is the foundation for our behaviour. But his making it clear is a great spur for us to think about our identity and its place in forming and creating our behaviour. Let me close by drawing out five questions:

- Do you know that the Lordship of Jesus is the foundation for who you are, not vice versa? This is the essence of grace. Jesus came, died on the cross, beat sin and death and the devil, rose again and is established as Lord – so that we can be his people. He did not do this because our behaviour demanded that he be our Lord, or warranted it,

or deserved it. He did this despite the fact that we were living in the domain of darkness, alienated from God, enemies of God. The Lordship of Jesus is established on his grace and mercy, not on our behaviour!

- Do you know that, in receiving the Lordship of Jesus, you have submitted every part of your life to him? Jesus will not be compartmentalised to Sunday, nor will he be limited to certain activities, nor will he accept half-hearted submission. He is not the Lord that fits around your job, nor is he the Lord who rules part of your money, nor is he the Lord who has a 'hands-off' approach to the habits and hobbies you find dear. Jesus is Lord of the whole walk. His Lordship dictates what loans you apply for, and how you apply for them. His Lordship rules your work choices, not your work choices rule him. His Lordship instils grace in your parenting choices so that your little ones meet him as Lord every day. His Lordship decides your leisure activity, your books, your movies, your music, your... His Lordship sets your life, and moulds your whole walk. His Lordship is our identity.
- Do you know that the Lordship of Jesus is a thing of great depth and wonder? It is a thing to be marvelled at, plumbed and studied so that it can be understood more deeply and then applied. This is Paul's prayer in 1:9-10. How can we apply the whole counsel of God if we don't read it, ponder it, meditate upon it and apply it? How can we walk worthily of our Lord if we spend no time studying his Lordship and revealed will? How will we be established in the faith as we are taught if all the teaching we get is our desired 20 minutes on a Sunday? Here is a call to read

- and read and read, and prayerfully ponder and think upon, and meditate through the Lordship of Jesus.
- Do you know that the Lordship of Jesus is enough? There is a complete sufficiency about the Lordship of Jesus, for his people. There is no need for anything more, anything less. It is not deficient when it comes to dealing with your human nature, or your life, or the realities we face every day. It is not deficient in helping you parent, in guiding education, in encouraging wise employment decisions, in helping to monitor the things we imbibe and absorb. It is not lacking for marriage, employment, singleness, leisure, old age and young age. There is no more you need for life – so please don't stray from the Lordship of Jesus. To stray from this truth is to stray into life that will lack...
  - Do you know that the Lordship of Jesus is a fount of great thankfulness? You see, without that Lordship, I still live in the domain of darkness, I am still alienated from God, I am at war with God, my sins remain piled up and unforgiven, I have no life, and I do not know God. You see, without the Lordship of Jesus, my town has no hope, my friends have no hope, my family has no hope. You see, without the Lordship of Jesus, my identity is battered by the world, moulded by the devil, at the whim of public opinion and the latest trends. The Lordship of Jesus has restored me to God, has dealt with my sin, has brought me peace by blood, has moved my home from hell to heaven, has allowed me to come into the throne room of God. Thanks be to the Lordship of Jesus!!!