

# Walk in the Riches of Christ

Steve Lewis - [www.SpiritAndTruth.org](http://www.SpiritAndTruth.org)

(Colossians 2:6-15)

As we have seen in the previous sessions, what Christ has accomplished on our behalf brings glorious riches (Col 1:27). We have all the wealth that comes from the treasure of wisdom and knowledge in Christ. But there is more to the riches in Christ, and Paul is going to describe some of these things in today's passage.

## Col 2:6 - Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, [so] walk in Him,

**Therefore** usually indicates a transition in the flow of thought, and it could be translated: "In view of everything that has been said before." To understand why Paul used the word *therefore* in Colossians 2:6, look back to the immediate context to see what he has been building up to in his flow of thought.

As we review what Paul has said so far, we notice that the subjects of the sentences change periodically. In general the primary subjects of the sentences for Col 1:1-14 are in the first person. However, in Col 1:15-23 when Paul is talking about the greatness of Christ, he uses the third person. In Col 1:24-2:5 Paul switched back to the first person when talking about his ministry on behalf of the Church.

Section	Primary Subject of Sentences	Primary Topic
Col 1:1 - 14	First person "I / We"	Paul's thanks and prayer for spiritual maturity
Col 1:15 - 23	Third person "He"	The greatness of Christ
Col 1:24 - 2:5	First person "I / We"	Paul's passion for the Church
Col 2:6 - 23	Second person "You"	Applying Christ's work directly to YOU

In the passage covered in this session, we notice a definite change in the subject of the sentences. In general Paul will begin using the second person as he discusses how the work of Christ applies directly to the Colossians.

**"As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord." Received** (*paralambanō*) literally means "to receive near." Paul is using this word the same way he used the word **learned** in Col 1:7 where he said they had learned the word of truth, the gospel, from Epaphras when the church in Colossae was originally established.

**Christ Jesus the Lord** = the Colossians received, accepted, and believed three important truths about Christ. First, Jesus is the Christ or Messiah which God promised in the Old Testament. This emphasizes that Jesus is the Savior of the world. Second, the Messiah or Christ is identified as the human person whose name was Jesus. This emphasizes the complete humanity of Jesus, which was necessary in order for Him to pay the death penalty for the sins of mankind. Third, Jesus is the Lord – this is the Greek word *kurios* which refers to His sovereignty and supreme authority. Paul sums up all that he has already taught about the deity, humanity, and supremacy of Jesus.

**Walk in Him** = He is saying, “put these truths into action in your life and your lifestyle.” **Walk** is the Greek word *peripateō* which Paul used in Col 1:10 where he prayed that as they continue to grow in spiritual maturity they would “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” In this verse Paul is *commanding* them to do it. The verb is a present imperative – “keep on doing this.” He wants them to habitually live in a way that glorifies Christ.

**Col 2:7 - having been firmly rooted [and now] being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, [and] overflowing with gratitude.**

First, Paul pictures a tree which has deep roots that hold it firmly in place. He says “**having been firmly rooted**” (*rhizoō*) which means “to strengthen with roots; to be firmly grounded.” The perfect tense indicates something that happened once in the past, but which is having continuing results in the present. This pictures the time of their original planting when they first heard the truths of God’s Word, followed by their continued growth toward maturity in Christ.

Next, he says, “**being built up in Him**” (*epikodomeō*) means “to build upon” so here Paul pictures the construction of a building level by level on a solid foundation. The present tense indicates something that is continually in process, just as the spiritual growth of the Colossians is continuing over time. This is coupled with the word “**established**” (*bebaioō*) that means “to make firm or stable.” Both words are in the present tense, indicating that each level of the building being constructed is stabilized before the next phase is added.

Here Paul adds, “**just as you were instructed**” (*didaskō*) which is the same word used in Col 1:28 where he said that it was his job to “**teach** every man.” The teaching ministry of the Church is the primary means through which believers are able to grow toward spiritual maturity as they are built up and established in the truths of the faith. Finally, they are to be “**overflowing with gratitude.**” Here Paul tells them what the extent of their thankfulness should be. The Greek word *perisseuō* means “to super-abound; to furnish so richly so that there is an overflowing abundance.”

**Col 2:8 - See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.**

In Col 2:4 Paul warned them, “**I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument.**” But here Paul expands on what he meant. He starts by saying, “**See to it**” (*blepō*)

which means “to be on the lookout or to be watchful and aware of any signs of danger.” This is an imperative in the present tense, which indicates that they are to be constantly on the lookout.

Paul describes a danger, followed by a list of the means by which the Colossians might fall into that danger. **“That no one takes you captive”** (*sulagōgeō*) which literally means “to carry off as a captive or slave” or “to be led away and made subject to one’s captor.” Paul then lists the means by which a believer might be taken captive.

First, **“through philosophy”** (*philosophia*). Early philosophical schools included Cynicism, Epicureanism, Hedonism, Idealism, Materialism, Skepticism, and Stoicism among others. In the ancient world of Paul’s day there was a centuries-old tradition of philosophy that permeated the culture and society. This is the kind of danger that Paul warns the Colossians against.

Second, **“and empty deception.”** **Empty** (*kenos*) means “resulting in nothing; having no effect; destitute of spiritual wealth.” **Deception** (*apatē*) means “deceitfulness.” Paul is making a play on words here, because the philosophers’ highest goal was what they called **virtue**, which is the Greek word *aretē*. So here Paul is saying that what they called *aretē* (virtue) is actually *apatē* (deception). The content of those philosophies was based on speculative but plausible-sounding explanations. However, their ideas were not rooted and grounded in the truth of divine revelation.

Third, **“according to the tradition of men.”** Tradition simply means something that is passed on between people. The context must determine the meaning, since the tradition may be good (2 Th 2:15; 3:6) or bad (Mark 7:3). Here it is worthless and harmful; the foolish theories of the philosophers.

Fourth, **“according to the elementary principles of the world.”** The phrase **elementary principles** (*stoicheia*) means “any orderly arrangement or series of elements.” This simple term was used in various ways to describe quite different things. Some of the possible uses include:

- the letters of the alphabet as the elements of speech
- the elements from which all things in the universe are made
- the rudiments or fundamental principles of any art or science
- the heavenly bodies as elements of the solar system
- the spirits or the hierarchy of spiritual forces which influence the world

Since the context determines the meaning, there are two possible ways we could translate this word in this verse. First, Paul may be saying that those philosophical ideas are simplistic and limited to only what humanity might speculate upon using finite and flawed human perception and reasoning. A second option is that Paul is referring to the supposed hierarchy of spirit beings that were included in some of the ancient philosophies of the day. This second option gains support from Paul’s description of the so-called rulers and authorities that were created by Christ (Col 1:16) and over whom Christ is the head (Col 2:10). Then in Col 2:15 Paul says that God “disarmed the rulers and authorities, made a public display of them, having triumphed over

them through Christ.” These two options explain why some English Bible translations have different renderings. For example:

- “elementary principles of the world” = NASB, NKJV, CSB
- “elemental spirits of the world” = ESV, NIV, NLT, NET, RSV

Finally, “**rather than according to Christ.**” Here is the antidote or countermeasure for the danger. Christ is the yardstick by which to evaluate philosophy and all of human knowledge. The philosophers were measuring Christ by their philosophy, as many men are doing today. But Christ is the measure for all human knowledge rather than the other way around. There is no point seeking something more or better than what we already have in Christ, since His work to reconcile humanity to God effectively nullified and superseded any worldly wisdom.

### **Col 2:9 - For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,**

Col 1:19 stated, “it was the [Father's] good pleasure for all the **fullness to dwell** in Him.” Here Paul is even more specific. The word **For** presents the reason that Christ supersedes every worldly system of wisdom. Paul says “In Christ all the fullness **of deity dwells bodily.**” Not only is Christ fully God, but He is also fully human. This may be the clearest statement in all of the Bible about the person of Christ.

### **Col 2:10 - and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;**

The original Greek sentence structure is important for understanding this thought. It is not that we have been made complete – but that He was made complete, and as long as we are in Him then we can partake of the completeness that is His. It could be translated literally as “You are in Him who has been made complete.” **Complete** (*plēroō*) is the verb form of the noun used in the previous verse to express that the **fullness of deity dwells in Christ bodily**. It means “to fill to the top so that nothing is lacking.”

**He is the head over all rule and authority.** In Col 1:16 Christ created all rulers and authorities, whether earthly or heavenly. Here Christ is **head** over all rule and authority. The context implies that Paul is talking about spirit beings in the heavenly realm. In Col 2:8 he had mentioned the **elemental spirits** (*stoicheia*) who have a role in deceiving believers and leading them astray. Further support is in Col 2:15 where Paul describes Christ’s defeat of the rulers and authorities.

### **Col 2:11 - and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;**

**Circumcision** (*peritemnō*) means “to cut around” and it can be used in one of two ways based on the context:

1. First, it can mean the literal surgery of cutting around the foreskin. The following references explain why this rite was not required of Christians (Acts 15:5; 1 Cor 7:19; Gal 2:3; 5:2; 6:12-13).

2. Second, it can be used metaphorically to mean “the removal of the sins of the flesh.” This is how it is used in the following New Testament passages (Rom 2:29; Phil 3:3), and this usage is also seen throughout the Old Testament (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4).

It is clear that the second metaphorical meaning is what Paul intends here in Col 2:11, because the type of circumcision he refers to is “**made without hands**.” So Paul is not referring to Judaizers who were trying to convince the Colossians to submit to the rite of circumcision. Paul had already dealt with that many years earlier in his letter to the Galatians who were facing that exact issue. The **circumcision** Paul mentions here has to do with the sin nature, and the **fullness** we have in Christ is able to provide the desire and power to control fleshly impulses.

**Col 2:12 - having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.**

Paul briefly describes the significance of the rite of baptism, with its symbolism of being **buried** with Christ and then **raised** up with him. He is not talking about the physical act of being immersed in water, but is referring to the spiritual identification believers have with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. We are dead to sin, but alive to righteousness in Christ. Paul explains that the rite of baptism (like the rite of circumcision) does not have any saving power in itself. As he says here, it is “**through faith in the working of God**” that believers experience Christ’s fullness applied to their lives. Paul wrote more about the significance of baptism in his earlier letter to the Romans (see Rom 6:3-14).

**Col 2:13 - When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,**

In Col 1:21 Paul wrote, “**And you** once having been alienated and hostile in mind in evil deeds.” Here he starts the same way: “**And you being dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh.**” We could compare these two sections this way.

Colossians 1:21-22	Colossians 2:13
21 <i>And you</i> were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, [engaged] in evil deeds,  22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death,	13 <i>And you</i> being dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh,  He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,
– alienated; hostile mind; doing evil + reconciled to God (through <u>His</u> death)	– transgressions; sinful by nature; dead + alive together <u>in Him</u> ; forgiveness of sins

Paul elaborates on the truths which he presented previously. Before faith in Christ, we were alienated, hating God’s claim on us, and engaged in selfish, evil deeds. In Col 2:13 Paul continues to describe this wretched condition. In Col 1:22 Christ’s solution was to die in our

place in order to reconcile us to God. In Col 2:13 the emphasis is on the new life which God gives us in Christ. Paul uses the word *charizomai* (forgiveness) which means “unmerited pardon.” It is a grace gift given to us by God through faith in the working of God.

**Col 2:14 - having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.**

**Certificate of debt** (*cheirographon*) means a certificate of debt or bond agreement which was written or signed in order to make it legal. The **decrees** of God’s moral law put us under a debt that we could never pay, which applies to the Gentiles as much as to the Jews. It represented God’s perfect standard of holiness, which fallen humanity could never reach. And it was against us as well as hostile to us. But God solved this problem for us.

First, He **canceled** it or wiped it away (*exaleiphō*) meaning to completely obliterate, erase, or sponge away. Second, He has **taken it away** (*airō*) which means “to take upon one’s self and carry what has been lifted up.” This same word was used by John the Baptist when he looked toward Jesus and said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The perfect tense emphasizes that the certificate of debt has been permanently removed, has been paid or canceled, and cannot be presented again. Third, He has **nailed it to the cross** where it was paid in full by the substitutionary death of Christ. So many important things happened on that cross, and in the last verse of this section Paul will mention one more thing that Christ accomplished there.

**Col 2:15 - When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.**

God **disarmed the rulers and authorities**. All rulers and authorities were created by Christ (Col 1:16), and Christ is head over all rule and authority (Col 2:10). The context helps us to see that when Paul writes about the rulers and authorities, he is talking about spirit beings which are arrayed against God and anyone who belongs to Him. This lends support to the idea that *stoicheia* can be translated as “elemental spirits” in Col 2:8. **Disarmed** (*apekduomai*) expresses how completely the rulers and authorities were stripped of their power. And God “**made a public display**” of their defeat (*deigmatizō*), “to openly make an example of something.” God led them in a triumphal procession because of what Christ accomplished on the cross.

Since Christ Jesus the Lord has done all of these things for us, why would we pursue any other so-called wisdom or knowledge? We literally have more than we could ever ask or hope in Christ alone.