

# (Colossians) 07 Walk in Him, Not in Human Wisdom-Traditions

by Bob Utley

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of walking in a personal relationship with Christ, discerning truth from human traditions, and living a life of gratitude and faithfulness.*

**Duration:** 38:11

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Colossians 2:6-7

**Topics:** "Colossians"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of Scripture and a personal encounter with God in Christ for salvation. He highlights the need for believers to walk in Christ, drawing from Colossians 2:6-7. The speaker discusses the danger of being led astray by human traditions and empty philosophies, urging listeners to prioritize the teachings of Scripture. He also emphasizes the significance of Jesus as the incarnate Son of God, who died for humanity and will come again.

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## Transcript

I think one of the things that I enjoy most about worshiping with you all week by week is the spiritual atmosphere that I feel like that Schuyler's Gifts brings. Thank you, brother, for sharing that with us. We need an atmosphere where aha moments can occur, that's what the song was about, repentance moments, rededication moments, trusting Christ moments.

We're trying to present an incubator for spiritual dialogue, not between us and you, but between you and God. And it's not about agreeing, it's about intimacy with God. I cannot tell you in words how much the second chapter of Colossians has meant to me in my life.

I don't know what other chapter rivals the truths that are here that have so become north stars to my theology. And it is with such honor that I get to share this message with you. I hope you were able to read Colossians 2 during this past week.

I want to pick up today and go from verse 6 to verse 15. So if you'll open your Bibles with me, you need to bring your Bibles because the power is not in the eloquence or knowledge of any human pastor or presenter. Power is in the revelation of Scripture, amen? And I want you to see this as I work through it.

I'm trying to bring my understanding, my experience with God, my educational background. I'm trying to bring that. But the older I get, the more I realize that that is a damaged, historically conditioned, denominationally corrupt view.

I don't have any other view. I can't come neutral. You can't come neutral.

None of us are neutral. But the more I look at texts like this, the more I'm convinced that Christianity is a person, not a doctrinal creed. Now, there are doctrines related to this person.

You can't get around that. But the essence is not our doctrinal agreement, but our worship and trust in the one who called us out of darkness into light. This text has many wonderful aspects.

I want to work through this with you, and I want you to keep your Bibles open. Pray for me next week. I may go up in a holy smoke next week, and Peggy would say, are you going to shout today? Yes, I think I will.

This text just does things for me that I don't find other texts doing. And some are positive and some are negative. And I just pray the Holy Spirit would be effective in helping us to digest and then to implement this revelatory truths into our worldview, into our daily life.

And that is the goal. So, as you know, it's very hard to outline these first few verses. I stopped at verse 5 last week, but I could have very well gone through verse 7. The chapter in verse division is not something that is inspired.

We're trying to find themes. We're trying to understand structure. Sometimes that's easy.

Sometimes that's not easy. And in some ways, this is kind of put together more in patterns than in clear, separated thoughts. Verse 6 and 7 is probably a unit unto itself.

Therefore, and whenever you see that, it means linked to what I just said. So verses 1 through 5 that we talked about last week are going to impact what he's about to say in verses 6 and 7. Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus, so walk in him. Man, what a text.

Now, I am an evangelical. Evangelicals, I think, could be characterized as those who believe that scripture is true and believe that a personal encounter with God in Christ is crucial for salvation. You cannot osmos salvation in a Christian family.

You cannot believe correct doctrine unto salvation. There has to be an encounter. Now, this encounter can occur in many places, in many ways, and at many times through life.

I have no hope of trying to outline the number of ways that the creator God impacts his creatures. But I know that he wants to personally encounter them. Now, we use little catchphrases.

Everybody has them. We use them. And one of them is receive.

Now, this word can be used in several ways. It can mean receive a person, and that's what I think it means here. But Paul can use this very same word to receive traditions.

I mean, Paul did receive the traditions of Ananias. There's nothing wrong about receiving the traditions when the traditions are true. The problem is we receive so many traditions that are not of God.

Now, Paul is going to react in this chapter against human philosophy and human traditions. Now, I want you to stop me for a minute. I think that this first began in Paul.

Now, Paul is an academic person. I think Paul worshipped God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. He was not against thinking through truth.

And I think one of his first books, the book of Galatians, Paul had to struggle with the traditions of Judaism, the Judaizers. When he got to Corinth, we debate on what the dates are, but years later, he got to Corinth. And now he is having to confront the traditions of Greek thought.

And now he's come to Colossians, prison epistle, early 60s. And now he's having to confront the systematized traditions of what we call Gnosticism. And yet, even in this chapter, I must admit to you, our knowledge of who these false groups are is terribly limited because when Paul's going to bring up circumcision in the middle of a discussion about Greek philosophers, you're going, what? I mean, that doesn't fit unless he's using it metaphorically or unless there's somehow a Judaizer tendency mixed in with these Greek thinkers.

We just can't answer that. But what Paul is coming to is where is truth? How do I find truth? One thing that's painful but crucial as a professor at a Christian university is when young people come to you with all of the apparent, quote, right, conservative, evangelical answers. And you feel comfortable that they have a knowledge of the truth.

And yet, you begin to push and challenge and ask for where they get it. And suddenly, you realize it's the truth of family traditions or the truth of denominational indoctrination or the truth that somebody they love and trust gave to them. And it's not that that truth is wrong or bad or inappropriate.

That's not at all the question. The question is how do we get truth into the heart, mind, worldview, and daily life of the believer? It cannot osmosis. It just does not develop.

There has to be an aha moment. And that aha moment is not just receiving Christ. It's how do we walk in him.

Somehow, we've got to take what we believe and get it on the street. And we've got to analyze what we believe in light of what we've been told by sincere religionists. Because some of what they've said is true and some of what they've said is false.

I'm always amazed. And this really does amaze me. And I hope you hear the depth of my concern in trying to communicate this to you.

When Paul is dealing with false teachers, he will cut them off at the knees on their false statements, their misunderstandings, their combining. He just cuts them off at the knees without any thought to how they feel. But when he's dealing with new believers or believers who've been influenced by the past or believers who've caught up, new believers, he loves them.

He gives them time to grow. He does not attack them. He gives them room to learn and know.

It's the same problem. The false teachers view and the new believers, it's the same problem. And yet the motive behind the believer determines how Paul deals with it.

In one, it's very harsh. And in one, it's very loving and understanding. And I don't often know the difference.

I don't often know how to do that. That's why I think we have to say that Christianity is primarily a relationship with God in Christ. Yes, there will be some use of the mind.

Yes, there will be some use of the volition. Yes, there will be some walk in him. But sometime when all is said and done, after studying the Bible for 40 years and desperately wanting to live a life pleasing to God, I do not know and understand the will of God for my life in every area.

I walk in a fog as you work in a fog. And my tendency is to bite those who don't walk in the same fog I walk in. And we're all in a fog.

We see through a glass darkly. You think your dark glass is better than my dark glass, but when it comes down to it, we need Jesus Christ. And we're all damaged people.

We're all broken. Our worldviews have been put together in ways that are not completely in conformity to Scripture, and even the Scripture itself sometimes seems to be ambiguous and paradoxical at the very point we want clarity. God wants trust.

Wants trust. Now, I'm assuming there has to be a moment to say yes to Jesus Christ. Does it have to be a sinner's prayer? No, that's not a Bible thing.

Does it have to be a moment where I recognize my sin and call out to him for help? Yes, I think that has to occur. Can it occur young and old in different ways? Certainly, no question. But once I trust him, it looks like to me there's got to be a second reception.

And that second reception is now that I know him, what am I to do now? And what I have to do now is to know him so as to live like him. I've been struggling with this with you in the book of Hebrews on Sunday night. We cannot separate faith and faithfulness.

We cannot separate justification from sanctification. Walk in him is a biblical imperative. Don't just know about him.

I pray to God that heaven is not a theological test. Now, the Lord Jesus Christ is a typical New Testament title. If I put a verb in here, Jesus is Lord, it would be a baptism formula for the early church.

I believe that was their affirmation. And here I think it's talking about just a title for Jesus of Nazareth. I don't feel like I have time today to go through what all the implications would be for these different titles for a first century believer, but there are tremendous implications behind these titles we're calling him.

And I think we go over that far too much. The walk in him is a present imperative. Now, I've had the privilege to share Ephesians with you when I first came and I'm always grabbed by Ephesians.

Walk is a biblical metaphor for Christian living. Ephesians 4.1, walk worthy of the calling wherewith you've been called. Ephesians 4.17, no longer walk as the Gentiles walk.

Ephesians 5.2, walk in love just as Christ also loved you. 5.15, be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise men. We're called on to do more than believe.

We're called on to do more than believe. And then in verse 7, look with me. There are four participles used as imperatives.

Now, this terminology is rather unique to Ephesians and Colossians, both present epistles, both based on the same outline. And the first one is a form that means something happened in the past and the results become a state of being. The next three, however, deal with daily continuous living.

So one sets the foundation and the other the daily life. Notice how it works out. Having been firmly rooted.

Now, there is the foundation. Now, if we got the right foundation, what do we do with that foundation? Almost sounds like 1 Corinthians 3, doesn't it? First, we build, being built up in Him. It's continual, established in your faith, but it's present, continual.

And by the way, these first three are all passive voice, which means I can't be firmly rooted. I can't be built up. I can't establish my faith.

These are outside agent produces the activity. This is God must do this. Now, yes, I do.

I am a covenant person. I do believe that we must cooperate. We must allow God.

I've said it this way. There's a spiritual door in our lives and the handle is on our side. When we receive Christ, we must open the door.

Yes, it's the wooing of the spirit. Yes, it's the initiation of God, but we participate in salvation. The Christian life is the same crucial participation as salvation.

We must open that door to be established and to live a Christ-like life. The last one of these is the one that we sang about. I assume you read this when you pick that hymn out.

And this is the idea of overflowing with gratitude. Now, this is a present active. Here, it's not an outside agent that produces the spiritual need.

I burst in gratitude and joy. Think of Colossians for a minute. I made this little note in my commentary.

To know the gospel is to rejoice with inexpressible joy. Chapter 1, verse 12. To live life appropriate, Colossians 1, 10 and 11, and to live with thanksgiving, Colossians 3, 17.

How do I know a Christian? They're rejoicing. They're not pickle suckers. They're not nitpickers.

They're not judgmentalists. They're not nanny, nanny, nannies. My soul does enough nanny, nanny, nannies.

Where are the lovers? Where are the grateful livers? Where are the hearts that overflow with thanksgiving? When I remember where Jesus found me, man, I don't know if I want to sing my tribute or fall on my face before God when I hear that song. I remember where I was when this grace found me. I know that anything I am, I am by the grace of God.

Gratitude. Is your life characterized by gratitude or by demands? Or by judgmentalism? Overflowing with gratitude. Now, verses 8 through 15 is one sentence in Greek.

It is a sustained argument, a sustained kind of presentation of this truth. It's directly related to the Gnostic false teachers, directly. You cannot interpret this without some historical knowledge of the false teachers.

To proof text these out of this book, out of this historical context is to misunderstand Revelation. The Bible was never meant to be proof text. It was never meant to be pulled out of its context.

It is a human message from a divine author, but you must read the whole message and know who wrote it to whom and why. That's why we're led around by the nose by somebody who says, turn to chapter so-and-so, verse so-and-so, as if that made any difference to anything. I remember once a guy was upset with me because our church accepted folks who had not been baptized by a Baptist pastor, which is almost the unpardonable sin in Lubbock, Texas.

And I said to that guy, if you'll show me in the Scriptures, I'll be willing to repent. He said, turn to Deuteronomy. Surely, brother, you don't think that Deuteronomy addresses Christian baptism.

I'm not over it. See to it, another imperative, think through it. You mean Christians are called on to think through their faith? You know me well enough to know now that I try to get you to think by shocking statements.

If you have not had a new thought about God in five years, you're brain dead. You think you got it all settled? You think you reached a plateau somewhere in the past and all you got to do is mouth what you heard somewhere? Don't you think none of us arrive until we see him face to face? That all of us are in process? That all of us have a theology that needs to grow and repent of some of it? See to it. Consider diligently that no one take you captive.

Now, I'm not going to... This is the word to kidnap or seduce. I'm not going to develop this because this is what's going to come up in chapter 2, 16 and following. Where Paul's going to come back to this theme.

But I do believe with all my heart that the vast majority of American Christians are kidnapped by American culture. Kidnapped by rampant materialism. Kidnapped by the faith of their parents.

Kidnapped by some unique personal experience. The sharpest false teachers are on television. And my fear is that God's people can't even protect themselves because of their ignorance of the word of God.

Through philosophy. Now, here we're back. Paul just hammers philosophy in Colossians.

He hammers it here. We're into human traditions. Now, whether they're Judaistic human traditions or Greek human traditions or, God forbid, Baptist human traditions.

Problem is you don't think you have any of them. There's the problem. You don't think Baptists have a sacred cow? Change the order of worship.

Be so much mooing around here. A lot of mooing anyway around here. It's a moo-moo place.

I don't know who put you in the moo-moo committee. I always get tickled when charismatics say to me, well, you got to speak in tongues. Jesus isn't enough.

Or Church of Christ say to me, you got to be baptized in a certain formula. Jesus isn't enough. Or Baptists say to me, oh, you got to quit this, that, and the other.

Jesus isn't enough. Jesus is enough. He's enough.

And it's not your view or my view. It's Jesus is enough. And men take it and twist it and put it in systems, put it in rules.

There are some rules. We have so many rules and so many traditions that the scripture is lost in the baggage of our personal priorities and personal preferences. See that no one take you captive through philosophy, empty deceptions.

And notice the threefold use, threefolds, not four, of the little Greek preposition kata, according to. Now, he's going to lay out these traditions that'll kill you spiritually. Number one, the traditions of men.

Now, whether it's Judaizers or Greeks or denominations or 20th century Americans or family, we've got to go back to scripture. It is fair to say to any person that claims to speak for God, can you show me in the Bible where you got that? I guess the verse that haunts me from the Old Testament is the Isaiah 29, 13. These people worship me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

And their religion consists of rote memory traditions that they receive from other human beings. Second, not according to Christ, based on human reasoning, not on revelation. Number three, according to the elementary principles.

Now, this is the Greek word stoikia. We saw it in Hebrews when we were there in chapter, end of chapter 5, beginning of chapter 6, that I told you I thought was Jewish traditions there. It's a word that means the ABCs of something, the beginning of something, the basic truths of something.

The Greek philosophers used it for the four elements, basic elements of the world. In this context, and that's what the key is, what is it here? It's this Gnostic speculation. It's these angelic levels.

Now, this is going to be so clear if you look at the next few verses with me, that Paul is drilling in on the false teachers, that he's magnifying Christ and depreciating human speculation that tries to make Scripture relevant to its culture rather than according to Christ. Look at verse 9, in him... Man, that's an emphatic position in the Greek sentence. It's in him... Just look at this flow through here.

In him, in whom, verse 3. In Christ, verse 5. In him, verse 6, verse 9, verse 10, verse 11. With him, verse 12, verse 13. It's this personal emphasis that contradicts and supersedes human traditions.

In him, all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form. The Gnostics would assert the deity of Christ, but they would deny the humanity. So Paul comes back and he picks up on this word fullness, which basically meant these angelic levels of Gnosticism.

You say, well, I don't know anything about Gnosticism. With all of the debacle of the Da Vinci Code in the churches of America, I would think that some of you would have looked up Gnosticism in some encyclopedia somewhere. But you know what Christians say to me? I ain't reading that.

Fine, be dumb. Get drug around by the nose by every fad that comes along. Be a legalistic nitpicker instead of a grateful lover.

I did change your mind, you dogmatic, arrogant, denominational literalist. I'm not reading nothing. Fine.

Fine. Fullness of deity dwells, lives. Not for a period of time.

Not the spirit of Jesus came upon Jesus at his baptism and left Jesus before he died on the cross. Not this crazy Gnostic speculation that adds things to the Gospels. But God's people don't even know that there's anything added because they don't know the basic truths of the Gospel.

Your Bible's not precious to you. It's a fashion accessory in bodily form. He's really one of us.

He really died in our place. He's really coming again to get us. Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, is truly human.

Now, what does that say about him that he's willing to do that? And what does that say about you of what you could be, what you should be, what one day you will be in him? Oh, the dignity of humanity. You have become complete. There's a play on that very word, fullness.

This is a play on the word pleroma. This is the same word about the fullness of him. We're not complete in secret knowledge.

We don't need more knowledge. We know more than we need to know now. We're not walking in it.

He makes us complete. He is the knowledge and wisdom of God. Verse 10, he is the head over all rule and authority.

This is the Gnostic angelic levels. This is the false teacher's view of salvation as secret passwords through angelic realms. This is the view between a holy God and a lesser God that could form matter.

The key is not the death of Christ, but that you know the secret knowledge. You join the right group to get this knowledge so you can get to heaven when you die. A plague on groups with secret knowledge.

A plague on them. Now, why circumcision is here? I have no clue. It's either a metaphor for the old life and the new life.

Somehow there is some Judaizer tendencies in these guys. Paul is thinking back to Galatians, trying to link up another sphere of false teaching. I just don't know.

But I want to tell you when I get to verse 12 and 13, my mind gets lit up. And it gets lit up in the words used here. Now, Paul, boy, I think he was a wonderfully educated man.

He was not a good preacher, by the way. Apollos was the good preacher. Paul, put you to sleep.

As I've said, if you fall asleep in his sermon, he can raise you from the dead. You fall asleep in mine, we'll call the hearse. He builds these compound words.

I think Paul made up many of them. He loves several Greek prepositions. The one here is the word soon.

And it means joint participation with. Look at this flow. We are co-buried in 12.

We are co-raised in 12. And we are co-quickened in 13. Now, if you know this well, if you go back to Ephesians 1, verse 20, that's where everything God the Father did for the Son, when you get to Ephesians 2, 5 and 6, the Son is done for the believers.

And these soon compounds are used in this same way. Now, this is our view of baptism. This is linking up, we think, with Romans 6, which I think is a valid interpretation, though not the only.

We see baptism as a crucial event in the Christian life, not option, not based on obedience. I mean, if Jesus did it and commanded us to do it, guess what? We see it as a symbol of death, burial, and resurrection. Now, that looks like what we're talking about here.

We were buried with him, we were raised with him. Man, look in verse 13, you were dead. Now, the Bible uses three kinds of death.

God told Adam, the day you eat of that tree, you're going to die. Well, Adam and Eve ate and they didn't die physically, but their relationship with God was broken. And so we're talking about all humans have a broken relationship with God.

We call it spiritual death. If that spiritual death is not dealt with before physical death, which all of us are going to have, read Genesis 5, then results the third biblical death called the second death, mentioned in the epistles in the book of Revelation and in Revelation 20, and we would call it hell, the lake of fire, a permanent separation from fellowship with God. Do you mean that as Paul looked out over the ancient cities that he saw people as either in Christ or in death? That's what I'm saying.

When you look out into the world, how many distinctions do you see? Paul saw you're alive in him or you're not alive at all. Now, that's either true, a hyperbole, or we are of all men to be most pitied. Made you alive together with him, having forgiven all of our transgression.

The word forgiven here is the same root as the word grace. Having graciously forgiven. Now, here we're starting in verse 14 into a military kind of pattern.

It's really combining several things here, so follow with me in your Bibles. Having canceled the certificate of debt, which was basically a legal document signed by the person that they owed something. Well, what did we owe? Well, if you go back to the old covenant, the soul that sins, it will surely die.

If you look at Paul's summary in Romans 3, all of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So the Old Testament meant to be God's revelation, God's wonderful gift to Israel. His self-revelation had turned from a blessing because of human disobedience and rebellion into a death sentence.

The curse is the Old Testament. So Jesus, born of a woman, born of the line of David, perfectly fulfilled the Old Testament. Died not for his own sin, but for our sin and gave us the free gift of redemption in his sacrificial once for all death.

Nailed it to the cross. What? The curse. Our inability nailed to the cross has taken it out of the way.

That same verb, taken out of the way, is what John the Baptist said when he saw Jesus in John 1, 29, behold, the Lamb of God, finish the quote with me, takes away the sin of the world. Same verb. Jesus' death dealt with our sin problem.

Nailed it to the cross. Look at verse 15. I like the new American standard.

Disarmed. New Jerusalem Bible has stripped away. It's like on a battlefield if a soldier was dead, the winning army took all his armaments, took all his weaponry.

There naked there was the soldier and all that he had was gone. Jesus on the cross stripped the demonic powers of all of their influence. Totally disarmed the spiritual realm.

Totally overcame whatever levels of demons and angels there were. Totally overcame it. And then he uses this wonderful metaphor of a Roman triumphal march where the conquering general rode in a chariot with white horses and drugged behind the chariot were the conquered prisoners.

The demons against humankind are drugged behind the cross that is now turned into a chariot of victory. Oh, the imagery is overwhelming. And the imagery is so powerful when we remember where God found us and the victory of our salvation and our ability not to serve self anymore but to serve him.

We have been freed from the tyranny of self. And now we are free to walk in him. Walk in him.

I'm sorry, Lord, that Paul is in prison. I'm sorry false teachers came to Colossae. But part of me rejoices that Paul had a chance to react to the same kind of things that we face in our day.

And that Paul had time to write. And that he wrote for us as well as every generation of Christians in between. And that he wrote truth that we can depend on and walk in and stand without fear before you on that great day when all of us, all of us stand before you.

I thank you for these truths. Deliver us from cultural Christianity. Deliver us from judgmentalism.

And free us into a life of gratitude and joy and service and daily Christ-likeness. Amen. I really want you to read the rest of chapter 2 before you come next week.

I really want you to think what I've said today because I'm gonna call on you to respond in him. I said at the first that we desperately try to present an incubator atmosphere where anybody and everybody can make the spiritual decisions that the Holy Spirit has put on their heart. I do not know what those decisions might be.

But I call on you in this moment of time. Whether you come forward or stay where you are is irrelevant. But I call on you to present yourself to God.

To be open for Him to speak to you. To follow the still small voice of the Spirit of God that has been turned loose in your mind as we have gone through chapter 2.

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