



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermons

## A True Walk

Colossians 2.6-15

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### Introduction

What comes to mind when you hear the word, “walk”? Think of synonyms such as hike, jaunt, stride, stroll, amble, exercise, plod, shuffle, slog, trek, troop, trudge.<sup>1</sup> Or, consider the introduction to Wikipedia’s article on “Walking.”

**Walking** (also known as **ambulation**) is one of the main gaits of terrestrial locomotion among legged animals. Walking is typically slower than running and other gaits....

The word *walk* is descended from the Old English *wealcan* “to roll”. In humans and other bipeds, walking is generally distinguished from running in that only one foot at a time leaves contact with the ground and there is a period of double-support. In contrast, running begins when both feet are off the ground with each step....<sup>2</sup>

Sound exciting? No? That’s not surprising. Many find walking tedious, mundane, dull. It is often associated with a lack of real action (e.g., a walk in baseball, or a team that walks the ball up the court in basketball). But Scripture often uses “walk” to talk about the life we are to pursue, as we see in Colossians:

- 1.10 – it is what Paul prays for as the Colossians’ goal for life.
- 2.6 – it is the crux of his transition from his foundation to his response to the Colossian heresy.
- 3.7 – it is used to remind them of the way they once lived but were to live no longer.
- 4.3 – it is a vital component in their relationship with outsiders.

Walking is basic, steady, solid; it is something everyone can do. It suggests the ideas of balance and maturity, underscored by the figure of keeping both feet on the ground. It is a good word for a tough world. And it’s the figure Paul uses as he begins his response to the Colossian heresy.

### Walk Steadily (2.6-7)

The main verb in the sentence comprising verses 6-7 is the second person plural present imperative form of “walk” (v. 6; περιπατέω, *peripateō*). Paul was commanding them to “keep walking as you received Christ Jesus the Lord” (“continue to live your lives in him”-NIV).

The participles in verse 7 explain how the Colossians were to stay on track as they kept walking. The first, a perfect passive verb, conveyed that they had been and were to remain “rooted” or “fixed” (ρίζω; *rizōō*) in Christ. The second, a present passive verb, emphasized that they were to continue allowing themselves to be “built up” (ἐποικοδομέω; *epoikodomeō*). Being rooted and built up kept them “established in the faith,” a verb meaning, “to put someth[ing] beyond doubt, confirm, establish; to make a pers[on] firm in commitment, establish, strengthen.”<sup>3</sup>

### Walk Wisely (2.8-10)

Paul was straightforward about what their walk would be like. The Colossians would be met with perils and temptations to change course (v. 8). So, he commanded them to remain alert (“see” [βλέπω; *blepō*] is a present tense imperative verb). They would need to do so to keep from being “taken captive,” a word meaning, “to gain control of by carrying off as booty, make captive of, rob,”<sup>4</sup> and often used of taking plunder from a captured ship.

They were to be especially wary of the specific threat posed by “the philosophy” (τῆς φιλοσοφίας; *tēs philosophias*), a system of thought that purported to be substantive, but was in fact an “empty deceit,” literally, an “empty enticement” (κενῆς ἀπάτης; *kenēs apatēs*). Remaining alert would enable them to see it for what it really was (cf. 1 Thess 5.21).

The philosophy was empty because it was “according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (v. 8). “Elemental spirits” translates one word that primarily meant “that which belongs to a series, the smallest constituent parts,”<sup>5</sup> but had come to refer to “transcendent powers that are in control over the events of the world.”<sup>6</sup>

Recalling the point he made in 1.15-20, Paul called on the Colossians to remember who Christ is, what he had done for them, and what that meant for their lives (2.9-10). Using a phrase that may have been one of those used by the heretics, he told them that Christ is where “all the fullness of deity” is to be found. How reassuring, then, that they had been “filled in him”; literally the phrase is, “you are in him having had and having all the fullness” (v. 10).<sup>7</sup> They could be sure of this because Christ “is the head of all rule and authority.”

We better understand the force of Paul’s point when we familiarize ourselves with the historical use and meaning of the terms “rule and authority” (ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας; *arches kai exousias*) (vv. 10, 15). Part of the ancients’ understanding of “the elements of the world” (vv. 8, 20), “rulers and authorities” are among the terms encompassed in the broader category of “principalities and powers” (cf. Col 2.15; Eph 3.10; 6.12 in the RSV). This is the group of words Paul used to refer to “the list of enemies of Christ and his people ... [that are] both heavenly and earthly, divine and human, spiritual and political.”<sup>8</sup> They included any power with priorities, goals, or agendas that were at odds with God’s control of the world and thus were associated with and devoted to advancing the purposes of “this age.” Jesus’ disciples were to reject them because their ability to deliver what they promised was empty; they were not really the ones in control.

### Walk Confidently (2.11-15)

The basis for confidence was the new reality they had in Christ (vv. 11-14). They had experienced spiritual circumcision—“without hands” (cf. Deut 10.14; Jer 4.4)—made possible “by the circumcision of Christ” (v. 11). Thus, they had been separated from “the way of the flesh,” a phrase synonymous with the earlier references to the goals and agenda of this age.

Lest they had forgotten when they had undergone that transformation, Paul reminded them that the exact time was when they had “been buried with him [Christ] in baptism, in which [they] were also raised with him through faith” (v. 12). The burial-resurrection event also meant they had left the life where they were “dead” in the “trespasses and the uncircumcision” of their “flesh.” They had been “made alive” and thus forgiven by God (v. 13).

It is important to stress that it was not their power, ability, or effort that had accomplished this transformation. Rather, just as happened to Paul and all others who submit to Christ, it was the action of God, through Christ, who “cancel[s] the record of debt<sup>9</sup> that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (v. 14).

By this act, God had “disarmed the rulers and authorities ... by triumphing over them” (v. 15). The human philosophy’s agenda and empty enticement had been exposed—“put to open shame.” The imagery of disarmament, especially the word “triumphing” in verse 15 calls to mind “a triumphal Roman military procession [wherein] the defeated king with all of his surviving warriors and the spoils of war were paraded through the streets of Rome, as a public spectacle for all to see.”<sup>10</sup>

Few images better illustrate God’s conquest over the agendas of this age. The triumphal procession was a prominent feature in Rome in which the Romans took great pride, showcasing the empire’s absolute power over the world. The irony in Paul’s statement is stark, highlighting the subversive nature of the Christian faith. Rome, the most visibly powerful of the world’s “rulers and authorities,” which delighted in flaunting its triumphs, had been triumphed. Christ, not Rome, was the true Lord.

## Conclusion

As one who tries to walk regularly, I find the Wikipedia article’s section on “Healthy Benefits of Walking” to be encouraging.

Sustained walking sessions for a minimum period of thirty to sixty minutes a day, five days a week, with the correct walking posture, reduces health risks and has various overall health benefits, such as reducing the chances of cancer, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, anxiety and depression. Life expectancy is also increased even for individuals suffering from obesity or high blood pressure. Walking also increases bone health, especially strengthening the hip bone, and lowering the more harmful low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, and raises the more useful good high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol.

Studies have found that walking may also help prevent dementia and Alzheimer’s.

There’s nothing in that I didn’t already know. But reading it reminds me to keep ambling steadily along, especially on days my trudge is a slog.

“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, . . .” (Col 2.6-7).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Thesaurus.com, s.v., “Walk.” Accessed February 21, 2023. <https://www.thesaurus.com/browse/walk>.

<sup>2</sup> “Walking,” Wikimedia Foundation, last modified 20 February 2023, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walking>.

<sup>3</sup> βεβαιόω (*bebaioō*); Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 173. The faith grounding assumed in Colossians 2.6-7 began with the teaching of Epaphras (Col 1.7).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 955. The verb is συλαγωγέω; *sulagōgeō*.

<sup>5</sup> στοιχείον (*stoicheion*); Eckhard Plümacher, “στοιχείον,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (EDNT)*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 3:277.

<sup>6</sup> Bauer, 946.

<sup>7</sup> The Greek phrase is, ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι (*este en auto peplērōmenoi*); *peplērōmenoi* is the perfect passive participle form of πληρόω; *plēroō*.

<sup>8</sup> D. G. Reid, “Principalities and Powers,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 747.

<sup>9</sup> Arnold suggests the translation, “their written note of indebtedness” (Clinton E. Arnold, “Study Notes on Colossians,” *ESV Study Bible*, ed. Lane T. Dennis [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008], 2297. The word translated “record” (ESV) or “written note” (Arnold) is χειρόγραφον; (*cheirografon*), “a hand-written document, specif. a certificate of indebtedness, *account, record of debts*” (Bauer, 1083).

<sup>10</sup> Arnold, 2297.