

CROSSING THE BORDER

An Expositional Study of Colossians

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CHAPTER FOUR

HIS ADVICE ON ADVANCE 2:1-10

THERE are three "gets" for the Christian life - Get out, from sin; Get in, to life in CHRIST; Get on, in full salvation in Him. Our present passage deals with this third.

For the underlying truth here is progress - pilgrim's progress, if you like. For Christianity is a "going" concern.

Think of the Master's three "go's". "Go home to thy friends, and tell them," Mark 5:19. "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city . . . into the highways and hedges, and compel [persuade] people to come in," Luke 14:21, 23. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," Mark 16:15.

There is, of course, a legitimate time for pause - to seek rest, or repair, or recuperation, or re-commissioning.

You get a typological illustration of that in the case of the children of Israel at the Red Sea, where, through Moses, GOD gave them two commands. First, "Stand still"; second, "Go forward," Exodus 14:13, 15.

The first only a preparation for the second. So, though at times the Christian will wisely stand still, he is never to come to a standstill. Says Hebrews 6:1, "Let us go on" . Yes, let us!

WHEN WE SHALL BEGIN

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him," 6.

(a) "Ye have" - the Epistle is addressed to Christians. You might as well tell a chair to walk whose legs are lifeless as tell a non-Christian to do so whose soul, as yet, is dead. But if "ye have," then ye can, and should.

(b) "Received" - that seems to be the New Testament's normal way of indicating our side of the saving transaction, as tantamount to that other word, so often used, believe. "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name," John 1:12.

Have you received Him as your own Saviour? Perhaps you say you are not sure, you can't put your finger on any specific moment? Well, do you believe on Him, trust Him, as your Saviour? You do? Same thing!

"Ye have!"

(c) "**the Lord**" - let us never forget that He comes not only to be the Saviour of our soul, but also the Lord of our life - in complete control of those whom He has "**bought with a price,**" I Corinthians 6:20, His blood-purchased possession, for His use, and His glory.

WHAT WE SHALL BECOME

Good learners, 2-3.

Here is envisaged a group of students "**knit together**" in a common purpose to pursue their studies in their richly rewarding subject. The classroom is pervaded by a beautiful atmosphere, a spirit of love - love for their fellow scholars, love for their studies, love for their Master. The apostle writes that they may be "**comforted,**" that is, encouraged, in their pursuit.

The aim, then, is that they may have "**all riches of the full assurance of understanding**" - a difficult phrase, which Moffatt calls, "all the wealth of conviction that comes from insight".

These people have got to combat the insidious false teaching that is being spread around, and something more is needed than the mere intellectual assent to the true doctrine - there must be a real and deep conviction of the truth if they are to do battle against error.

Is it not always so, even for us in our day and generation. for we, too, are bidden to "**fight the good fight of faith,**" I Timothy 6:12, and to "**hold fast the form of sound words,**" II Timothy 1:13.

We take up the formula of our Creed, the epitome of "**the faith,**" and, clause by clause, we declare our belief therein. Do we accept these statements merely because they have been handed down to us, and it has become little more than a routine habit to acknowledge them? in that event, we shall not have much inclination to "**hold fast**" to them, in the face of some questioning, nor to "**fight**" for them against the onslaughts of disbelief.

Perhaps we have gone further. We have sought to examine these things in the light of modern scholarship, and are satisfied in our own minds that they are true. Good, so far as it goes; but it could be but a cold agreement of the mind. We shall not speak lightly of this attitude: the mind assuredly has its part to play - but something further is here called for.

Through the frame of orthodoxy there needs to flow the red, pulsating blood of conviction, such a growing "**understanding**" of what lies behind, and within, these truths as shall capture the ardent enthusiasm of our whole being. Such a man will prove himself a faithful custodian, "**I have kept the faith,**" and a doughty warrior, "**I have fought the good fight,**" 2 Timothy 4:7.

Our apostle continues, "**the acknowledgement of the mystery,**" or, as again Moffatt has it, "the

open secret".

What is this, once so hidden, and now so open? It would seem to refer to some relationship for this Age between GOD the Father, and GOD the Son, as if, in the counsels of the Triune GOD, it were determined that CHRIST should be for us the all-embracing Repository, as Divine Representative of the Deity, of all that we Christians can need, "**In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,**" 3. What a wondrous casket for all seekers after the knowledge of all the What, and the How, of the Christian life.

Here, then, is advance, progress in knowledge - "**then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord,**" Hosea 6:3.

Good walkers, 6.

How splendidly some people walk; how slovenly, others. This Epistle exhorts all true believers to "**walk in Him**". It is interesting to observe how frequently the walk is used to describe the Christian life.

As we have noted earlier, the Christian life is not a sedentary occupation, but a pedestrian affair, a walk-often, a running; on rare occasions, even a flying, Isaiah 40:31.

If now we "**walk in Him,**" we shall certainly "**walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us,**" Ephesians 5:2.

- We shall "**walk as children of light,**" Ephesians 5:8, following Him who is "**the Light**".

- We shall "**walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,**" Ephesians 4:1 - like as a soldier would walk according to military tradition.

- We shall "**walk in truth,**" 3 John 4, avoiding all pitfalls of error.

- We shall "**walk in wisdom toward them that are without**" Colossians .iv. 5, lest that by anything we say, anything we do, anything. we are, we should prove a stumbling block to any outside the fold.

And, as the secret of it all,

- We shall "**walk in the Spirit,**" Galatians 5:16, 25. He will be if we let Him, the motive power, the driving force, seeing that "**ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you,**" Acts 1:8.

Before we leave this point, let us note that our walk is to be "**in Him**". What a difference atmosphere makes to our walking. How sprightly we become on a clear, bright morning, how lackadaisical we often are when the day is heavy and murky. Our Lord is here presented to us as our enveloping atmosphere, and our Intimate environment, "**for in Him we live, and move and have our being,**" Acts 17:28 - so especially and exactly true of all believers.

Good trees. 7.

More than once godly folk are spoken of under the imagery of a tree. "**He shall be like a tree,**" says Psalm 1:3, and goes on to catalogue some of the attractive features of it.

Its fountain - "**planted by the rivers of water**" so that its roots draw into itself needful nourishment and maintain in it that continual freshness which may be the happy experience of us all.

Its fruit, "**that bringeth forth his fruit in his season,**" the seasonable and delectable "**fruit of the Spirit,**" Galatians 5:22, which the Heavenly Husbandman ever labours, and delights to see - fruit more fruit; much fruit; lasting fruit, John 15:2-5, 8, 16.

Its foliage, "**his leaf also shall not wither,**" giving abiding beauty of character to the tree, since "**He will beautify the meek with salvation,**" Psalm 149:4. Also, the thick foliage will afford shelter to many a weary traveller. Ideally, and prophetically, and we, too, in our degree, are in Isaiah 32:2, where "**A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind . . . as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock [shall we say, a great tree] in a weary land**".

Happy the man who becomes a shelterer of others from the heats and hazards of life. Furthermore, do you recall this, "**that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified,**" Isaiah 61:3? It is from His planting that the tree's promise flows.

I heard on the radio the other day that on inheriting a great estate in Ireland, Lord Kilbracken planted there hundreds and hundreds of trees. The Lord of Heaven is a supremely great tree-planter. Has He planted us? Then are we making progress, "**rooted in Him**"?

By the way, what a difference soil makes to growth. And don't forget to tend those roots.

I lived in a certain vicarage for fifteen years which had a pear tree in the garden; but never a respectable pear did it yield me all that time. I am no gardener; but my successor was - and, strange to relate, he had a bumper crop his very first year! Why? He went at the roots, which I was too ignorant to do. That's it! take care of the roots, the secret connection with the Soil - the Quiet Time with GOD, and the use of His appointed means of grace - the Word; the Footstool; the Table; the Worship; the Work, "**that ye may grow thereby,**" I Peter 2:2, and "**that He might be glorified**": not we, but He.

May we not be stunted trees.

Good buildings. 7.

Speaking humanly, Paul exhausts his very considerable powers of metaphor to indicate the variety, vitality, and virility of the Christian life; and here is one more figure: the believer is to be as a building.

The Foundation - "**built up in Him**". What a difference foundation makes to a house, as is so

plainly illustrated in the Master's "let's pretend" story of the two houses in Matthew 7:24-7. The Sand House may very well have been just as attractive, just as comfortable, as Rock House: the trouble was that it was ill-founded, and so ill-fated when the storm broke.

The Fashion - the happy style of the building in our passage is fairly deduced from the words here, "**abounding therein with thanksgiving**". Gladness opens the door of welcome, as if the mouth should utter a shout of praise. Joy streams out of the windows, as if the eyes shone to betray the grateful spirit within. Yes, the Christian may be, should be, as a building happy in the presence of its true Lord. Of a certain dwelling it was once said, "**It was noised that He was in the house,**" Mark 2:1. May it ever be so with the building of our lives.

The Finish - of that building is not here indicated; but may it not be inferred from the statement that this person is "**stablished in the faith**"? For He Himself has laid the foundation - indeed, is Himself the Foundation Stone - "**To whom coming, as unto a living stone. . . ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house,**" 1 Peter 2:4-5.

But what of the hypothetical person of whom the Master sadly records, "**This man began to build, and was not able to finish,**" Luke 14:30? The substructure was well and truly laid; but the superstructure never materialised. We should call him now a backslider, the object only of pity; oh yes, also of prayer. May any such be quickly restored, after the old promise of GOD, "**I will heal their backsliding,**" Hosea 14:4.

And after the backsliding may they return to the upbuilding again: this time to a truly happy finish. So, then, here is advance, progress, in all directions - in knowledge, in life, in fruit, in character.

And now-

WHAT WE SHOULD BEWARE

"**Enticing words,**" 4 - persuasive speech.

The apostle is far removed from those Christians in body; but he is right alongside them in spirit. He is well aware of the danger lurking in their midst, and of the insidious nature of the enemy propaganda. We observe his anxiety for them, lest by these specious approaches they should be "**beguiled**" away from the truth.

We observe, however, his joy that they have thus far stood firm, "**joying and beholding your order and stedfastness of your faith in CHRIST**".

It is a military figure that he uses: they have maintained a solid front in the face of the "**enticing words**" of the enemy agents.

What a lure such speech can be in the undermining of the unwary, either by the soft speech of the heretical protagonist, or by the books they try to sell on your doorstep. One of the difficulties that some Christians have in meeting these approaches is that the literature contains so much of the Bible. Of course it does; Christian people would not listen otherwise. That is how they are

caught.

But we recall Shakespeare's sage remark, that "the devil can quote Scripture to his purpose".

But he then overreaches himself, by misquotation and misapplication, as his effort in our Lord's temptation shews, if we compare Matthew 4:6 with Psalm 91:11-12.

Of Satan's emissaries the Psalmist says, "**every day they wrest my words,**" Psalm 56:5. Does not the Lord speak through him? Indeed, Peter, in speaking of Paul's Epistles, says, "**in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction,**" 2 Peter 3:16.

That is just what these folk do: they wrest the Scriptures - wrest them out of their context, and so wrest them out of their meaning. By the way, the first thing to do with these doorstep hawkers is to challenge them on I John 4:2-3, "**Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus is Christ come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not . . . is not of God**". In other words, the prime test is the acknowledgment of the full Deity of the incarnate Saviour.

Not enough that He be held to be a great teacher, or the best man ever - to grant Him anything less than absolute Deity is "**anti-christ**". Start there, and you will soon be able to shut the door. But beware of their "**enticing words**".

"Philosophy and vain deceit" 8.

We have a kindred warning where Paul is telling his protege to avoid "**oppositions of science falsely so called,**" I Timothy 6:20.

The apostle was a university-trained man, a great brain, and widely read, which is why he was able to attract an educated man like Dr. Luke, as well as those of a humbler sort. He would be the last man to decry the importance and value of philosophy and science as such. It is only their vagaries away from the truth that he is tilting against, and warning of.

A science that forgets that its realm is ever advancing, and therefore is not unchanging, is "**falsely so called**[/b]"; but, on the other hand, how vastly true science has contributed to our comprehension of our world, and to our conception of the might and majesty of our GOD.

Let not us Evangelicals be afraid of science truly so called, in the long run, and in increasing measure, it will not prove in conflict with the revelation of the Scriptures, but will, rather, confirm the same.

As for philosophy, there is a kind, an atheistic school, that leaves GOD out of its reckoning, and is therefore a "**vain deceit,**" since it leaves Him out who is the Chief Factor in the Argument.

Rather shall GOD have the central place in our thinking, after the pattern of John Milton's philosophy, as in his Paradise Lost,

"Spirit of GOD,
What is dark in me illumine,
What is low raise and support,
That, to the height of this great argument,
I may assert eternal providence,
And justify the ways of GOD to men."

Be that your aim, your theme, O ye philosophers, and we will gladly and gratefully welcome your helping our thinking in the ways of truth.

That other kind will only "**spoil you**," they will make spoil of you, since it rules out all that is of GOD, and "**after Christ**," and confines itself exclusively to the teachings of men, "**after the rudiments of the world**" - *stoicheia*, **the childish things, the A.B.C. of the world's "[b]vain**," empty, account of things.

Beware, says the apostle, of being made captive ("spoil") by any such system of thought. The downgrading of GOD's creative activity, as taught by the Gnosticism of the time, against which this Epistle is, in part, written as an antidote, is a signal example of such puerile vanity. And now:-

WHEN WE DO BELONG

The passage we have been studying has, in the main, a twofold theme - first, the progress we are expected to make, if we have begun in the Christian life; second, the dangers that inevitably lie in the pathway of that advance in the two closing verses, 9-10, the HOLY SPIRIT leads Paul to make two statements which will assure our hearts of the possibility of that advance, and avoidance.

"In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," 9.

That is eternally true, for He was, is, ever will be, in all respects, fully GOD. As the Athanasian Creed puts it "The Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal".

In all the calls, the claims, and the consequences of the Christian life, we believers have to do with One who is fully GOD, and who is therefore fully capable of undertaking all our affairs and necessities. So this Paul is able to claim, "**I can do all things** [required of me] **through Christ which strengtheneth me**," Philippians 4:13. What a comfort!

"Ye are complete in Him," 10.

So fully and completely do we belong that the apostle, even in this brief passage, three times over refers to us as being "**in Him**."

We might state the matter grammatically in the form of a syllogism:-

(a) Fulness is in Him.

(b) We are in Him.

(c) Fulness is for us - not for us, of course, the fulness of Divine Godhead; but the fulness of Christian Manhood.

That word "**complete**" is a picture word in the Greek.

They tell me that it holds the idea of a ship fully rigged, and equipped, for the voyage. So is it applicable to the Christian voyaging forth on the ocean of life.

"**In Him**" - is the

- *the Captain*, in charge of the vessel;

- *the Chart*, of the Word, to be consulted daily;

- *the Compass*, of the conscience, regulated, educated by the Word;

- *the Commissariat*, food for the journey, from the stores of the Word;

- *the Crew*, of our fellow-travellers, working our passage, seeing that we have nothing with which to pay for the trip;

- *the Conquest*, of His indwelling presence and power, seeing that we are not as barges, having to be towed by others on the bank, nor are we as sailing ships, depending on the favourable winds of comfortable circumstance for our progress, but we are as liners, that have the power of their engines within to triumph over waves and storms.

"**CHRIST in you.**"

The Colour, of our unashamed allegiance to Him to whom the ship belongs. Once the colour was the Skull and Crossbones of the rebel vessel; now it is the White Ensign, as a Flag-ship of the Divine Admiral of the Fleet.

The Coming into Port - for "**so He bringeth them unto their desired haven,**" Psalm 57:30. This is progress indeed, this is Full Salvation.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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