

## ***Growing by Gratitude***

Colossians 2:6-10 - NCBC, August 23, 2015

Main Point: **We grow spiritually by moving deeper into Christ alone.**

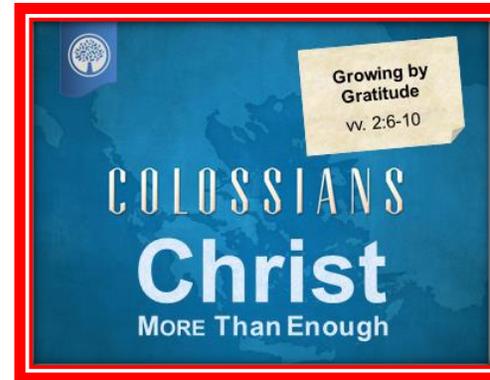
- Spiritual growth is by nutrition (v. 6-7a)
- Spiritual growth is by thanksgiving (v.7b)
- Spiritual growth is not by addition (v.8)
- Spiritual growth is by Christ's completion (v.9-10)

Application: **Grow by pursuing greater gratitude in Christ.**

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**Ps 100:4** *Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!*

**Opening Announcement:** Student Ministries – prayer for AWANA - Youth Parent Meeting with Elders & Youth Leaders – **Aug 30<sup>th</sup>, 6:30pm** Parents of CrossRoads Jr. High; One Way Sr. High Ministry



Certainly we all can say, "Thanks Lord." I want to briefly share with you how God has been working in our church family the last several weeks.

It's been thrilling to watch God work in our church family here – bringing reconciliation, making peace, and even granting new life by faith to two of our loved ones this month! This is the work of God brothers and sisters – Give thanks to Him! But there's more...

In just the past 3 weeks, I've met with two families who believe God is calling them to the mission field, and heard from one young student who believes God is calling him to be a pastor! And Pastor Denny recently shared with me that we have a waiting list of people who want to go public with their faith thru believer's baptism! So next Sunday – you're all going to want to be here at church after 2<sup>nd</sup> service – because we're all going to pack a celebration into the old sanctuary as we hear testimonies of God's grace and witness a number of believer's baptisms together! You don't want to miss it...

next week – **Aug 30<sup>th</sup> – a believer’s baptism service immediately following the 2<sup>nd</sup> service.** And if you’ve never been publicly baptized as a Christ-follower, any of your pastors and elders here would love to talk with you more about that this week. It’s such a joy to be partnering together in God’s gospel!

Let’s now continue our worship by reading from God’s Word. Please open your Bible to **Colossians chapter 2.** I’ll be reading **verses 6-10**, so please stand with me now in honor of God’s Word as I read our text for us from Colossians 2:6-10, reading from the **English Standard Version:**

***Colossians 2:6-10** Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. <sup>8</sup> See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. <sup>9</sup> For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.*

**This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.**

**Let’s Pray.**

Do you want to grow spiritually? If you’re like most Christians – you want to grow. And that’s a good thing. But the question is how? What does it mean to grow spiritually? And how should I – how can you become more spiritual in your life and faith?

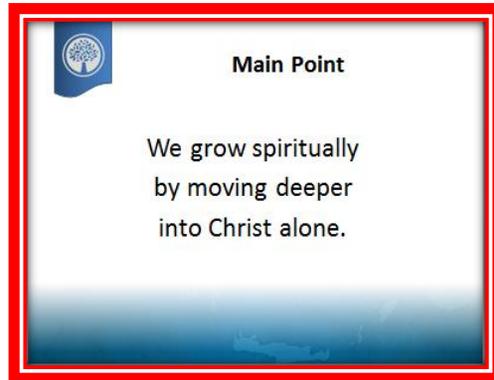
I remember as a young Christian the first time I encountered a professing Christian who saw spirits and spoke with the spirit world. That was certainly an impressive experience. Here I thought I was growing as a Christian through my quiet times of prayer and study with God and His Word – but in comparison to this person who could see spirits and speak with them – my life didn’t really seem very spiritual after all.

And then I met some believers who “had become so spiritual” that God talked with them and they heard His voice...just as clear as I’m speaking to you today...and again I had to question my spirituality. Why was my faith so small? Why hadn’t I grown to be as spiritual as these other believers had? Why was my faith so puny and ‘normal’ in comparison to these more enlightened Christians?

Have you ever been confronted by this? I must admit that as a young man, I got caught up in some of this mystical thinking as I was trying to sort out... what is the meaning of true spirituality? What does it mean to grow spiritually, and how should we pursue spiritual growth?

Well the believers in Colossae were asking the same questions. Remember, the apostle Paul is writing to the church in Colossae from Rome where he is imprisoned for his preaching of Christ. Paul is encouraged by the firm faith of the Colossian believers (2:5) – but he doesn’t want them to fall for the fancy words of some false teachers who are promoting a new kind of spiritual growth. You see the heresy of the day was not saying

that people should leave Christ – but just that now that they were saved by Christ, they must move on to higher forms of spirituality through extra teaching, rituals, and mystical experiences. But God uses the apostle’s letter here to give us a clear exhortation this morning:



**We grow spiritually by moving deeper into Christ alone.**

This is the main point of our text this morning. Spiritual growth is a result of our deepening faith in Christ. Christ is more than enough for us. He is the beginning and the end of the Christian experience – no true believer ever moves beyond a simple faith in His person and work.

If you want to grow spiritually, you don’t need to ask Siri how to do it? (She’ll just say hmmm... let me think about that for a moment.) You don’t need to google “how can I grow spiritually?” The answers that you seek are right in our text this morning. Consider with me now, verses 6 and 7:

*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup>rooted and built up in him and established*

*in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*

Here Christ-followers are commanded to walk – or continue to live out –their faith in Christ. But you might underline the phrase “as you received” in vs 6 and “just as you were taught” in vs 7.

The command for all Christ-followers is to continue to live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ – to continue to learn more and more about what it means to live in submissive worship to Jesus Christ every day.

You see – mature spirituality never moves beyond the simplicity of submissive trust in Christ alone. But so quickly we shift our hope from God’s Gospel --- and we pile up over our faith layers of do’s and don’ts. But when our obedience becomes what we are trusting in for our forgiveness or acceptance by God – we have only created a religious sand castle subject to the waves of fear, pride, self-condemnation, and confusion.<sup>1</sup>

In verse 7 we find 4 participles that modify the imperative “to walk.” From this verse we learn that: **Spiritual growth is by nutrition (v. 6-7a)**

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<sup>1</sup> David Benson, A New Look at Colossians

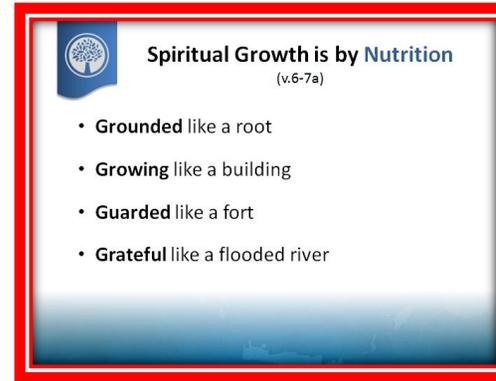


We grow spiritually as we move deeper into Christ and the nourishment of His perfect provision – not as we move beyond Christ or outside of Him or add truths or experiences to him.

Look carefully at the 4 participles now –

*Rooted, built up, established (or strengthened), and abounding (or overflowing).*

This is how a Christ follower is to progress further in spirituality over time. By nutrition. By feeding and strengthening what is already present. Not by adding something new to the mix. Think carefully about these descriptions of growth with me now.



### Grounded like a root

By faith every Christian is rooted, or grounded like a root, in Christ. Just like a tree that grows over time, it is through the deepening of the roots that the height of the branches extend its fruitfulness. So spiritual growth happens as we are more and more firmly united to Christ.

Paul amplifies walking in Christ further with the participle, “built up in him”. This is construction language. Spiritual growth is **Growing like a building**. Just like Christ is the soil into which our roots sink down into, so likewise Christ is the foundation upon which our building stands. He is our cornerstone upon which all parts of our live continue to rest and depend.

Spiritual growth occurs by feeding our hearts more of what we received from the very beginning – the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Verse 7 goes on...we continue living in Christ as we are “established in the faith” – meaning be to be strengthened or fortified or **Guarded like a fort**. Christians are not tumbleweeds with no roots, blown about by every

wind of doctrine. We are to be firmly rooted and established in the faith – or we might say the truths of God’s Gospel. It is the revelation of Christ that cements our lives and aims our spiritual progress.

Spiritual growth occurs as we are rooted, being built up, and made firm ...just as we were taught. And then consider briefly this last participle – abounding in thanksgiving. Spiritual growth is **like a river** - The picture is emphatic – one of the means and evidences of spiritual growth is an overflowing joy and gratitude – like the Mackinaw river overflowing its banks this spring.

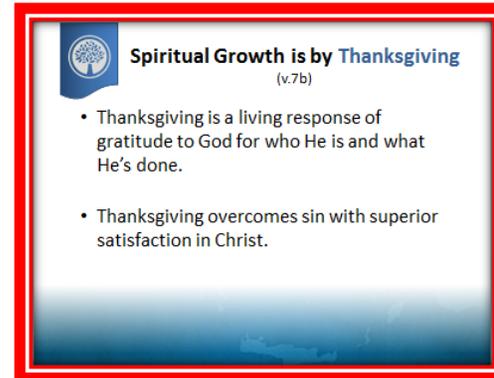
Let’s dig deeper into how we are to grow by gratitude. Paul’s point here is clear,

**Spiritual growth is by thanksgiving (v.7b)**



A growing Christian has a walk, or lifestyle, that abounds in thanksgiving.

Let me define thanksgiving from a biblical view point for you. The biblical view of thanksgiving goes far beyond a holiday in November. In the Scriptures,



**Thanksgiving is a living response of gratitude to God for who He is and what He’s done.**

In the Scriptures, the meaning of thanksgiving is quite similar to praise, blessing, giving glory, and power, worship. In fact, thanksgiving is so tied to the worship response of the heart that one commentator actually defines thanksgiving merely as “**God-centeredness**”<sup>2</sup>, or living with God at the center of your entire life and relationships.

Thus it is helpful for our understanding of thanksgiving to recognize that:

***The essence of thanksgiving is worship, and the essence of worship is thanksgiving.***

<sup>2</sup> David Pao, *Thanksgiving: An Investigation of a Pauline Theme*.

Thanksgiving is truly a lifestyle of worship. Thanksgiving is how we acknowledge and communicate reverence and awe to God. This attitude of the heart centers on who God is and what He has done and is doing for us.

So in other words,

***Thanksgiving actively tethers the heart to God, and thus protects it from spoiling counterfeits.***

God-centered gratitude enlarges our soul with such awe in the generosity of God that little lusts lose their power over us. A thankful heart is deaf to the squealing of our own coveting desires – and pays them no attention having been already so satisfied and full of Christ and His glory (John 6:35)!

Thus we acknowledge that:

***Thanksgiving overcomes sin with superior satisfaction in Christ.***

So, is your heart overflowing with gratitude? Are you abounding in thanksgiving?

If you call yourself a Christian, and yet your life is not characterized by a growing pattern of gratitude – then something is seriously wrong in your heart and faith. Martin Luther believed in this so strongly that he said “ingratitude is the root of all sin.”

A life of ingratitude is a significant problem and may reveal unbelief.

Have you lost your awe in God? Turn your eyes upon Jesus this morning. Make your heart glad in His mercy and grace towards you!

You see, God wants His children to grow. But we must not shift our hope from full dependence upon Christ Jesus the Lord who we first received when we were born again by His Spirit.

I don't want you to miss this. Spiritual growth is by thanksgiving – not by law. Spiritual growth is by nutrition –moving deeper into the cornerstone and soil of Christ alone. Spiritual growth is by nutrition, **not by addition (v.8)**



Notice verse 8,

***See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.***

The Colossian heresy is still alive and well today – people seeking to add rules and experiences and higher knowledge to our faith in Jesus Christ.

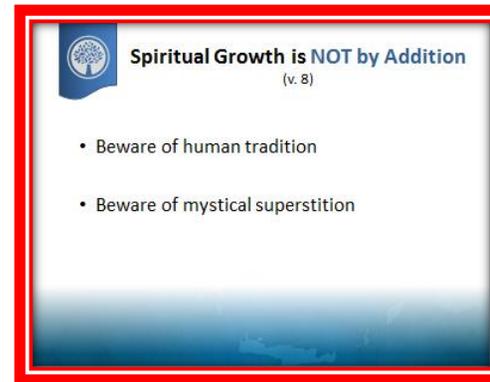
The wording in this verse is colorful. “*See to it that no one takes you captive*” is translating a phrase that literally speaks of kidnapping.

Don’t be kidnapped and carried away into enslaving error by the intellectual persuasions of human traditions and superstition. Just like verse 4 above, don’t trust your spirituality to the wisdom of men! You don’t need to add any teaching or wisdom to Christ for you to grow. You can never outgrow the full sufficiency of Christ for your salvation, sanctification, and eternal glorification with Him. Christ is more than enough!

Paul refers to the heretical teaching of the false teachers here as “philosophy and empty deceit.” The NIV translates it “hollow and empty philosophy.”

The literal meaning of philosophy is “love of wisdom” – but here Paul is warning against a sinister brand – that brand of philosophy that is according to human tradition and according to the controlling spirits of the world.

You see, we must not fall into the trap of believing that spirituality can be achieved by **human tradition or mystical superstition.**



First, we must **Beware of human tradition.** Tradition in itself is not bad – for biblically it refers to “that which is handed down.” (I.e. **2 Thess 2:15** uses the word tradition to speak of the entire sum of Christian doctrines which God had entrusted to the church.) But we must beware of traditions that come from people... human traditions.

For example, **legalism.** Do you know the difference between holiness and legalism? Holiness purposefully draws boundaries for myself from sin and its influence as I find greater satisfaction in Christ. But legalism transfers these holiness boundaries onto others – and judges their spirituality by how they are living according to my own self-made boundaries. Remember – law has no power to transform the heart. And true spirituality only grows in the freedom that Christ brings.

Another example of human tradition which promises to offer true spirituality is **asceticism.** Spirituality by self-denial. That somehow God will love me more if I just do more, or deny myself more, pray longer and harder, etc.

But look at verse 23 in this chapter – “*These indeed have an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.*”

According to the scriptures, Legalism and Asceticism have 0 value to helping us become more spiritual.

Finally, consider with me the example of **culture**. Beware of any spiritual authority that people assign to culture, social norms, or external rituals. **Culture is a wonderful servant, but a cruel master.** Anytime culture is made an authoritative measure of true spirituality – we’ve fallen into empty and hollow deception.

A pastor<sup>3</sup> in a neighboring state had an experience in his church a few years ago that illustrates how this can happen. Their church was very similar to ours in many ways, but their church leaders had been praying together for some time how they could most strategically be leading their flock in fulfilling Matthew 5:16 in their city. After a significant season of prayer, study, and research, they led the church in building a skateboard park for their troubled youth in the city. They invested significant funds and energies in this project, ending up with a state-of-the-art skatepark, staffed by a youth pastor equipped with a grill and an endless supply of hotdogs and hamburgers and an open Bible to minister to the city’s youth.

Well, as you might imagine ... this whole project was quite counter-cultural for many in the congregation. And then it happened!

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<sup>3</sup> Pastor Steve Viars, Faith Church, W. Lafayette, IN

Tattooed and pierced boarders were not only content to come and build relationships with the youth ministry staff during the week – but a few of them actually dared to come to church! One Sunday morning, three of these wild-haired and torn-clothing teens skated right into the church foyer. That’s right – skated. They had never been to church before, but as they wove through the crowd of Christians, it was clear that everyone was headed into a large room in the center of the building. So when they reached the doors to the sanctuary they flipped their boards under their arms and started walking down the center aisle... and would you believe it? The best seats in the house were still available... So you guessed it...these three skate-punks headed right for the front row, put their boards under the pew, and sat down and started looking around to see what would happen next.

And what do you think was the response of God’s people that morning? Stares. Judgment. “I knew we shouldn’t have built that skate-park! Now look – we’ve let sin into the church, and it’s all downhill from here!”

Church – culture was ruling in that moment wasn’t it? Do you ever give authority to your culture to define true spirituality?

Do you know what happened? An old retired elder in the church was sitting back in the congregation with his wife observing all of this...and when he saw what was happening, he immediately put love into action, got up from where he was sitting, walked down that aisle, and

warmly sat down beside those boys, put his arm around them, and said, welcome – I'm so glad you're here! That was a turning point for that church – away from culture, and towards the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Church – beware of adding anything to your definition of spirituality besides Christ. Christ transcends culture. And if you ever have to choose between Christ and culture – there is only one right choice for you – every time!

Now just a quick word about the deceptive philosophy according to elemental spirits. Paul's point here is to **Beware of mystical superstition.**

Horoscopes, astrology, Ouija boards, and other Spirit-world practices are not a means of true spirituality, and are to be rejected by the one who is submitted to the Lordship of Christ. Brothers and sisters – there is a dangerous curiosity with the supernatural that will usher you out of faith in Christ alone. We must remember we live in a world full of spiritual powers, principalities and demons. All that is supernatural is not from Christ!

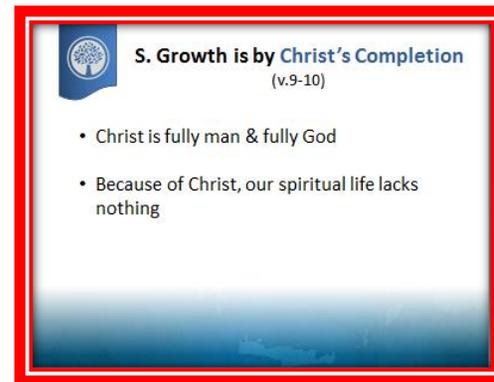
Spiritual growth is by nutrition, not by addition. Spiritual growth is by thanksgiving – by moving deeper into Christ alone. The point of Paul's argument this morning is punctuated by verses 9-10. **Spiritual growth is by Christ's completion (v.9-10)**



Christ is not just the beginning of true spirituality – Christ is the end of it! Any teaching that seeks to add something onto Christ for our spiritual growth only dethrones Christ from His rightful place of preeminence.

Verse 9 says,

*For in [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,*



**Christ is fully man & fully God.** Christ is the image of the invisible God. Fullness of deity emphasizes that the sum

total of all that God is – the totality of God is known in Christ, and Christ alone. Bodily form emphasizes that Christ was the God-man – through His incarnation we now have a high priest who sympathizes with us as one of us. And then notice verse 10...

*10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.*

### Because of Christ, our spiritual life lacks nothing

God has filled us or completed us in Christ. As one literal translation reads, “And you are in Him, having been completely filled full with the present result that we are in a state of fullness.”<sup>4</sup>

This is quite remarkable. Every believer shares in the fullness and completeness of Christ! Not that we are God or deity. No. But there is nothing lacking in the way in which God has caused us to live. We have really been given all that we need for true life and spiritual relations with God Himself!

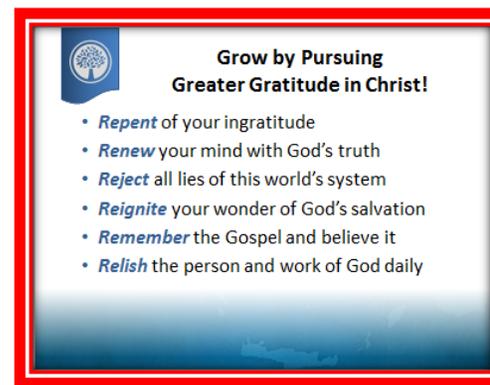
I don't know the condition of your soul this morning. Has Christianity just been a cultural experience for you up until now? Or maybe, you come this morning believing that you don't need a Savior, and that your good deeds will someday outweigh your bad. But friend, God is more holy than that. And God is more gracious than you know. He has sent Jesus Christ to save you from your religion, and to save you from your irreligion. Confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that Jesus Christ is Lord,

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Wuest's very literal expanded translation

and you will be saved. Receive Jesus Christ this morning by faith, and let your soul be flooded with gratitude.

So do you want to grow spiritually? Here's our primary takeaway from the Scriptures this morning:

Seek to grow by pursuing greater gratitude in Christ.

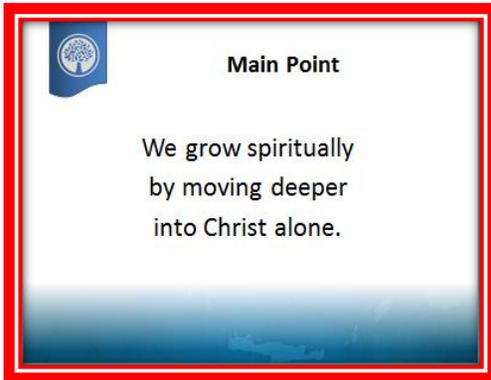


Spiritual growth occurs through faith and repentance as we make more and more of Christ, and less and less of ourselves. Is there any thinking that you've grown secure in this morning which needs to be repented of and forsaken? Are you leaning upon your own wisdom in some way to affirm your spirituality, or judge others spirituality? Then, **repent of your idolatry and ingratitude.**

- **Renew your mind with God's truth**
- **Reject all lies of this world's system**
- **Reignite your wonder of God's grace & salvation**
- **Remember the Gospel and believe it.** Embrace your own sinfulness – true spirituality progress never

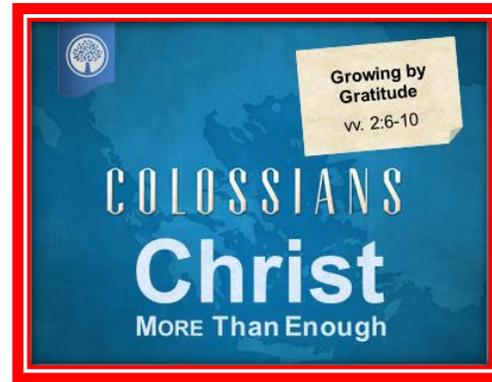
comes by denying our own sin. You move deeper and deeper into Christ as you move deeper into an understanding of your own sinfulness while simultaneously moving deeper into an appreciation of God's holiness. God is perfect and we are not. But through Jesus Christ – He has made a way that we can fellowship with God and truly know Him in holiness, joy, and freedom. This is true spirituality – to know God through His Son Jesus Christ. So,

- **Relish the person and work of God daily.** Devour God's Word – the Bible – that God has given you so that you might know Him through faith in Jesus Christ. Submit yourself joyfully to Christ's Lordship. He is more than enough for us, and God has made us fully complete in Him!



Wow. What an amazing God we have. Doesn't your heart soar with gratitude towards Him this morning? Aren't you thankful for the simple sufficiency of Christ – that we never move beyond Him or need something more.

We grow spiritually only by moving deeper and deeper in Christ alone. We don't need to pursue some mystical experiences, or listen carefully for the voices of spirits. Christ alone is more than enough for us!



Next week we will gaze upon the wonder of Christ's work on the cross as we look at verses 11-15 in chapter 2. I pray your heart is being encouraged in your faith as mine has been.

Keep reading Colossians this week! And come prepared to celebrate with us in a baptism service next Sunday – right after 2<sup>nd</sup> service! God has been so good to us!

Let's pray.

**Closing prayer.**

**Thank You – Closing Song**

**Jude 24-25** *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*