

Colossians 2:6-15

If you'll recall, Colossians 1:15-23 focused largely on the person of Christ—essentially how great Christ is and then how great our salvation is. Then, in the next section (1:24-2:5) the focus was back on Paul and the Colossians' particular role in and experience of God's great redemption. This section focused largely on Paul's great struggle to make the word of God plain and his desire for it to be powerful in the lives of the Colossians.

Now, we turn our focus back to Christ. As much as possible in a well-structured letter, Paul again seems to spontaneously burst with wonder at Christ. The heart of this passage comes in verses 9-10 where Paul echoes some of his earlier statements about Christ.

Not that he forgets the Colossians. Ultimately in this passage, Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit calls the Colossians to continued growth (v.6-8), but growth based on who Christ is (v.9-10) and what he has already done for them (v.11-12).

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 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.

These two verses offer a great concise look at the tension of the New Testament and the tension we feel as believers between faith and deeds. We know we're saved through grace, and yet we're also known by our good deeds. (cf. Ephesians 2:8, James 2:17) Many of Paul's letters deal with the tension by offering theology at the beginning and "practical" tips for holy living at the end. Here he uses the analogy of a tree.

He writes that the Colossians are "firmly rooted" (that is, "established in your faith") but commands them to continue to "walk in him." In other words, faith is the root of a person's spiritual life (planted as the seed of God's grace), and as the tree grows, it bears fruit. That's what a tree does; it bears fruit. Without roots, it is a dead tree and will not bear fruit, but with roots, it cannot help but produce fruit. In addition, as the tree grows and bears fruit, its root continues to deepen. In the same way, as we bear fruit as believers, our faith continues to grow and deepen. The more we trust God, the more we obey Him. The more we obey Him, the more we trust Him.

Put another way, Paul wants the Colossians to grasp the "already but not yet" nature of salvation. You are redeemed, he says, rescued from the domain of darkness, reconciled to God and have Christ in you. All that has been done in the past by Christ. But in the present, you're also human, that is, flawed individuals who need training and instruction (and forgiveness when you fall down). You need reminding to walk in him.

The question then becomes, how do you continue to walk in him? Paul gives us the answer: "as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord." (Notice there is no distinction between knowing Jesus as Savior and knowing him as Lord. Scripture teaches he is both or he is neither.) How did you receive Christ Jesus the Lord? You recognized that you had need and you came to God and asked for grace to meet that need. You repented of your sin and had faith that he would forgive. Keep doing that—recognize your need in big and small areas and come to God for grace. Know you cannot save yourself. Repent of your sin. Walk in faith. (cf. Psalm 138:6)

Finally, it seems important not to overlook gratitude. After we received so great a gift as salvation, "thank you" seems a profanely small gesture. And yet, God takes great delight in our being grateful for His goodness. Our heartfelt, lived out, "thank you" is a truly high calling he has given us.

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. For in him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in him you have been made complete, and he is the head over all rule and authority

Colossians 2:8 is really a transition verse. Paul gives a practical way of walking in Christ (“don’t be taken captive by the philosophy and tradition of men”) and then turns a corner to talk about the greatness of Christ in a manner that echoes 1:15-18.

In that transition, however, he gives a powerful warning. “See to it” implies that without standing on guard, believers will be taken captive by philosophy, empty deception, the tradition of men, and elementary principles (actually “elemental spirits,” that is, the spirit of the air, sun, etc.) We can be taken captive by two things: spiritual powers and the traditions of men, that is, our culture. If believers are not careful, they will measure things by their culture rather than by Christ. Are we Americans or are we Christians? Is the way you live, worship, treat your family, etc., more reflective of cultural norms or Biblical mandates and realities?

This idea also has echoes of the Old Testament, where time and again, the Lord told the people, “Don’t prostitute yourselves by going to the Baals. I am the one who created you and loves you and calls you my child and my bride. Why do you go to something else for fulfillment? You cannot find it there, only death and destruction is there, but I have life to the fullest.”

The question for us is what we think we must have in addition to having Christ. What are the things you think you’re entitled to? Or what do you think you need to live a complete life? Spiritual life or material life? The correct answer is “Christ alone,” for believers “have been made complete” in Christ. We need nothing else. Literally, the text says, “In him all the fullness of Deity dwells...and in him you have been made full.”

Deity dwells in Christ. God’s wrath and love. Grace and sovereignty. Power and humility. All of it appears in Christ. Words simply cannot describe the wonder of Christ.

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; 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 moves from the greatness of Christ to the greatness of salvation, and he does that using two of the great rituals in the faith.

Circumcision was the sign of God’s covenant with the nation of Israel (Genesis 17). In and of itself, it had no power, but it indicated that a person was part of the covenant and it served as a reminder of God’s grace in choosing His people.

Baptism serves a similar purpose, in that the believer identifies with Christ and his people and thus indicates that a person is part of the covenant. It also serves to remind a person of God’s grace in saving His people. But baptism is even more significant in that it re-enacts the death and resurrection of Christ, by which God extends forgiveness and life to the believer.

Paul’s purpose, though, is not just showing the parallel between circumcision and baptism, but to demonstrate what Christ has done in His people. The Colossians have experienced “the removal of the body of the flesh.” In other words, God has stripped away the self-exalting human nature that so wars against the Spirit. It is difficult to reconcile this idea with Romans 7:14-25, which makes clear that

believers still have a powerful sin nature, but see 7:24-25: "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" The victory is assured.

And it is assured because of the life that now resides in us. We were "dead in our transgressions" (2:13), but just as God raised Christ from the dead, He raises us from the dead. This new birth is what Jesus explained to Nicodemus as recounted in John 3. "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." God's life is put into us, and it is this new life, through the power of the Holy Spirit that will defeat the flesh.

Finally, notice that all these blessings, this great salvation the believer accepts comes through union with Christ. "In him you were also circumcised...buried with him in baptism...raised up with him through faith." Go back further and see that the Colossians "walk in him," are "built up in Him," and have been made complete "in him." Every spiritual blessing we receive comes by virtue of our identification and union with him.

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, 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. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through him.

These verses continue powerful statements for the believer and ones by which the believer should define himself. "I was dead in my transgressions and my uncircumcision, but now I am alive, for God has forgiven me because of Jesus' work."

At the cross, man's two great enemies were defeated.

- **Sin and guilt.** Because of our disobedience to God's law, there was a set of "decrees against us...hostile to us." This is legal terminology, that we owed a debt (cf. Psalm 14:2-3, Romans 6:23). But Christ, who had not sinned and owed no debt, took the punishment on our behalf. Thus, "He (God) has taken it (the debt) out of the way." If we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, "all our transgressions" are forgiven. God looks at us and sees the righteousness of Christ, and therefore He is just in justifying us (cf. Romans 3:26). We are no longer guilty.
- **The rulers and authorities.** These individuals are the same as the "elemental spirits" of verse 8. Ultimately, Paul is talking about the great spiritual enemy, Satan and his legions. These evil spiritual forces have no power over the believer (though we still must war against them) because God has already triumphed over them through Christ. They are disarmed. When confronted with spiritual attack, the believer can call upon the power of Christ and be assured of victory, because ultimately, he is just reinforcing the victory that Christ has already won.

Sample Study Outline

- I. Pray
- II. Context- Who is Paul? Who are the Colossians? What have they been talking about?
- III. Read Passage
- IV. Exploratory Questions
 - a. What do we see of God in this passage?
 - b. What do we see of man in this passage?
 - c. What's the most important word in the passage?
 - d. What's the point of circumcision?
 - e. How about baptism?
 - f. What are the traditions and philosophies of men that might take us captive today?
- V. Application Questions
 - a. How can you walk in Christ this week?
 - b. Who's someone you know who is "overflowing with gratitude?" What does that look like?
 - c. Do you struggle with feeling complete in Christ? How could you combat that?
 - d. Are there any enemies that you need to recognize that God has defeated? (Either your sin and guilt or Satan)
 - e. Have you obeyed Christ by being baptized?
 - f. How does God call you to action through this passage this week?
- VI. Other questions/thoughts
- VII. So what we've seen here is...
 - a. The importance of walking in Christ
 - i. He's Lord, not just Savior, so we continue to follow him
 - ii. We do that by recognizing our need and his grace and by living according to Christ
 - b. We have enemies.
 - i. Tradition of men
 - ii. Spiritual rulers and authorities
 - iii. Our sin and guilt.
 - c. The greatness of Christ (v. 9-10)
 - d. The greatness of our salvation
 - i. New birth
 - ii. Removed flesh
 - iii. All comes through union with Christ
- VIII. Pray