**Colossians – Keeping Christ in Focus Series**

**“The Work of Christ in You”**

**Colossians 2.6-15**

**Introduction**

For the past few weeks we have been looking at Paul’s letter to the Colossians. So far we have discovered that Paul’s close friend and founder of the church at Colossae, Epaphras, visited Paul while he was in prison for preaching the Gospel. Epaphras brought good news about the church’s growth in Christ but he also brought bad news about a group of false teachers who were causing believers to get their focus off of Christ. Basically, these false teachers were teaching that Christ was not enough for a person to enjoy the fullness of God. These false teachers taught that a person needed mystic insights from angelic visions. These false teachers taught that a person had to follow religious rules and regulations in order to receive the full knowledge and blessings of God. In the next section of the letter Paul will address these heresies head-on by presenting the work of Christ in the lives of believers. Today’s text is Colossians chapter two verses six through fifteen.

***6****Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,****7****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.* ***8****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.* ***9****For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,****10****and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;****11****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;****12****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.****13****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,* ***14****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.****15****When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.*

**Walk in Christ**

***6****Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,*

Paul knows that upon their conversion the Colossians had received the Anointed Christ, the historical Jesus, and the sovereign Lord. So Paul appeals to them to continue to walk in Him. Paul had already told the Colossians that he was praying that they would walk in a manner worthy of the Lord (1.10) but here he is encouraging them to continue in their walk in Christ. It seems that the Apostle doesn’t want anything to hinder or interfere with their spiritual growth.

He wants their present and continuous conduct to conform to the truth that Jesus is the Savior of the world, the Anointed One promised by the Father, and the Lord of lords. He reminds them what it means to walk in Christ saying, *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.* (1.7) We are often encouraged to walk in Christ but here the Apostle identifies four things necessary to walk in Christ. Paul is basically teaching the Colossian Christian how to walk. First, they must be firmly rooted, and then continually being built up, established, and overflowing.

First, they have been *firmly rooted.* At Youth Group on Wednesday nights we have been looking at the parable of the soil, which the better title is “The Parable of the Soils.” In the parable the Sower sows the Word of God and the seed falls on four types of soils. The soils represent the heart. So the Word of God falls on four types of hearts. You have the hard heart, which the Word of God doesn’t penetrate and is cast aside. You have the rocky heart where the seed is deposited in shallow soil but when temptation comes it withers away. You have the thorny heart where the weeds of this world choke out the seed. And you have the good heart where the seed of the Word of God is firmly planted and the roots grow firmly into the soil so that the plant yields abundant fruit.

Everyone’s heart can be described in one of these four ways. Either you have a hard heart where you cast off the Word of God. Or, you have a rocky heart where you allow temptation to wither your relationship with Christ away. Or, you have a thorny heart where you allow the things of this world choke out your relationship with Christ. Or, you have a good heart where by God’s grace you seek grow in Christ and begin you walk in Christ.

What Paul is talking about here in Colossians is having a good heart where your faith in Christ Jesus the Lord has been firmly establish in your life. The word “rooted” is in the perfect tense, suggesting a once-for-all experience, that is, being permanently rooted in Christ. This is your conversion experience when you surrendered your life to Christ. This is when you were born again when God by His grace firmly rooted the Gospel of Jesus Christ as Lord in your heart.

Now, being *firmly rooted* is a once-for-all experience but the rest of the verse is in the present tense, indicating a continual process. You have *been firmly rooted* but you must continually be *built up in Him, established in your faith, and overflowing with gratitude.* (1.7)

In our laundry room we have a sign that tells you how to do laundry. Wash, dry, fold, and repeat.



This is what the Apostle is telling the Colossians how to walk in Christ. You put yourself in situations where you can be built up in Christ, where you become more and more established in your faith, to the point where you have overflowing gratitude to God. “*Built up, established, overflowing, repeat!”* Built up, established, overflowing, repeat! Built up, established, overflowing, repeat! This is how we walk in Christ. So, are you placing yourself in situations where you can be built up in Christ, where you become more and more established in your faith, to the point where you have overflowing gratitude to God? Or, are you standing still in your faith? *You have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him!*

**Warning Against Empty Deception**

It seems that the Apostle is concerned that these false teachers might hinder or interfere with their spiritual growth of the Colossians so he writes, *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.* (1.8)

The Apostle now makes his first direct attack against “the Colossian heresy” calling their teachings a*philosophy, empty deception, the tradition of men,* and *elementary principles of the world.* None of which are flattering. Paul uses this direct language because he knows these false teachings have the potential to take us captive. As I mentioned in the first sermon of this series the Apostle Paul warned the elders of the nearby congregation in Ephesus four years earlier that *savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them*. (Acts 20.29-30) Judging from Paul’s strong words here in verse eight these savage wolves were attacking the Christians in the little church of Colossae.

Paul first alerts his readers to the danger saying, “*See to it,”* or “be on your guard.” Paul is warning the Colossians that these false teachings have the potential to take a person captive, which implies that these teachings could cause a person to become spiritual enslaved, held captive in the prison of philosophy, the dungeon of deception, the torture cell of tradition, and the penitentiary of elementary principles. When you combine verses eight through twenty-three you can see that these false teachers were advocating that such things as circumcision, dietary restrictions, and strict observance of festivals and Sabbaths as requirements to demonstrate that a person is a true believer. This is what I call a “rule keeping righteousness.” You have to keep the rules established by men in order to grow in your faith.

Even though this Colossian heresy had a unique twist, which we will discuss next week, this form of false teaching was not new to the New Testament Church. Ten years earlier (51AD) we are told in the book of Acts that *some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”*(Acts 15.1)

These teachers were of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed the Jesus was the Messiah but taught that *it is necessary to circumcise* Gentile believers *and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.* (Acts 15.5) This teaching was strongly condemned by the church. (Acts 15. 6-30) In the early church, those who taught a combination of God’s grace through Christ and human effort were called “Judaizers.” Judaziers taught that, in order for a Christian to be truly right with God, he must conform to the Mosaic Law. Circumcision, especially, was taught as necessary for salvation. This teaching was a mixture of grace through Christ and works through keeping of the Law.

Paul contemned the false teaching of the Judaizers in his letter to the Galatians when he wrote*, “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.* (Gal.1.6-7, 3.28, 5.6)So Paul was familiar with this false Gospel and now is ready to condemn it in Colossae. Remember the Gospel equation I shared with you before: Jesus + nothing = The Gospel. The Gospel is not Jesus + circumcision + dietary restrictions + strict observance of festivals and Sabbaths. The Gospel is Jesus + nothing = The Gospel.

These false teachers were pushing the Colossians to embrace new teachings and practices as a means to a more complete spirituality. Paul will demonstrate that this *philosophy,* this *empty deception,* these *traditions of men,* these *elementary principles of the world* are a fake Gospel and that in Christ we have all the fullness and completeness required. In the next four verses the “*in him*” language runs like a scarlet thread through the passage and serves to reinforce the point that Christians receive every spiritual blessing and all the fullness of God by virtue of their union with Christ. Paul warns them not to be taken captive by these deceptions but rather to focus on Christ.

***9****For* ***in Him*** *all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,****10****and* ***in Him*** *you have been made complete, and****He is*** *the head over all rule and authority;****11****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;****12****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 exalts Christ reminding the Colossians that in Christ *all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.* Christ is the image of the invisible God. (1.15) Christ embodies the fullness of the Father. (1.19) Christ holds all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (2.3) Therefore, there is no reason for believers to turn to anything else but to Christ alone*. In Him you have been made complete* so there is no need to try to add anything in the attempt to become more spiritually whole.

*He is the head over all rule and authority.* Christ is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and everything in it therefore He rules and has authority over all things and He is not subject to anything or anybody.

*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.* Paul attacks this heresy that teaches that physical circumcision was necessary to demonstrate your faith in Christ. Paul states that *circumcision made without hands* is what God does for everyone in Christ. Paul calls this divine act *the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.* Paul is referring to the act of God’s grace when He places us in Christ when *our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.* (Rom.6.6) At the moment we are placed in Christ God performs a spiritual circumcision by cutting away our sinful nature, what Paul refers to here as *“the removal of the body of flesh.”* The true circumcision is of the heart. (Phil.3.3) This is not a new Gospel. As the Lord spoke through Moses, *“Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart . . . to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.”* (Dt.30.6; 10.16; Lev.26.41-42; Jer.4.4; Ez.44.7) *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.* Praise be to God!

Paul continues to describe the moment of spiritual regeneration telling us that we have *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.* (2.12) In the same way Paul was not referring to a physical circumcision he is now not referring to a physical baptism. There are four different types of baptisms in the New Testament. There is the baptism of John, baptism in the Spirit, Christian water baptism, and baptism into Christ. It is an erroneous presumption to think that every time the word “baptism” appears in Scripture that it refers to water baptism. The word “baptism” means to “place into” or “place upon.” The fact is we were place in Christ at our conversion. When God placed us in Christ we are plunged into God’s grace and that is what Paul is referring to here in verse twelve.

Paul states two dimensions of our baptism into Christ. Paul states that we have *been buried with Him* and *also raised up with Him.* Christ’s death absorbed God’s wrath, provided atonement for sin, removed our guilt, and reconciled our relationship with the Father. Therefore, all those who have been *baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death* and have received all of these benefits. We have been plunged together with Him in His death. (Rom.6.3-6) But Paul continues saying *in which you were also raised up with Him.* So by God placing us into Christ we not only receive the benefits of Christ’s death but have also received the benefits of His resurrection. Christ’s resurrection demonstrated power over sin and death, freedom from the bondage of corruption, and a glorious hope of eternal life. So all of these benefits of Christ’s resurrection belong to those who are in Christ. Christ empowers us to *walk in newness of life*.

**Work of Christ in You**

*you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh,* but *He made you alive together with Him*. (2.13a)

The point of this entire passage is to show that is was the work of Christ in you is what brought you the completeness of God’s grace. Not human effort or rule keeping but God working faith in your heart is what placed you in Christ. Remember *you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh,* but *He made you alive together with Him*. (2.13a) *We were dead in our transgressions,* but God *made us alive together with Christ . . .**For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*(Eph.2.5-9)

But Paul wants the Colossians to know the full impact of what it means to be made alive together with Christ.

*“having forgiven us all our transgressions”*

First, to be made alive together with Christ means that all of our transgressions have been forgiven. The Lord blots out our transgression and remembers them no more. (Is.43.25) In Christ we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col.1.14)

*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.* (2.14)

For those who have been made alive together in Christ the certificate of debt that was held against us has been canceled. I like the way the NIV translates this verse, *the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.* We were serial violators of God’s Law in thought, word, and deed. These violations stood against us and condemned us but God took them all away by nailing it to the cross. With every resounding blow of the hammer nailing Jesus to the cross God was canceling out our spiritual debt. Making us spiritually debt-free. Like a Judge striking down the gavel God was declaring

that we are spiritually debt-free in Christ.

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

Because we have been made alive together in Christ we are convinced that no angel, no principality, no power that is able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. As a matter of fact, we are overwhelmingly conquers over all these things because Christ made a public spectacle of them having triumphed over them and totally disarming them. Those alive together in Christ can confidently say, *“Greater is He who is in me than he would is in the world.”* (IJn.4.4)

**Closing Thoughts**

Brothers and sisters, you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. Don’t allow anything to distract you from your growth in Christ. You have been made complete in Christ. Your sins are forgiven. Your spiritual debt has been canceled. All the opposition has been disarmed. You have been made alive together in Christ. Christ is at work in you, therefore walk in Him.

Jesus + nothing = The Gospel

**Call to Prayer**

*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith*

**Benediction**

*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, 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.* (Jude 1.24-25)