Colossians: Alive in Christ | Colossians 2:6-15

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[0:00] Welcome to you all. Glad that we can be together on this beautiful evening. As I said at the beginning of the service, this is actually a very special Sunday. It's the Sunday of Pentecost celebrating the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It's also a Sunday where we get to celebrate a baptism where Juniper Ducharme in a little while is going to come up and be baptized and join our church family officially. So we're very excited about these things.

It's interesting drawing all of these things together, the Holy Spirit, baptism, and then also this collect that we prayed earlier. These prayers that we pray every week that we call collects, these are laid out in advance. We don't write them. We pray them along with Anglican churches all around the world. And the one that we happened to pray made an interesting request. A collect normally states something that's true about God and then makes one request of God. And so what we prayed, if you remember, is we prayed that in light of the fact that we have the Holy Spirit, that because of the Spirit and through the Spirit, that we would be able to have a right judgment in all things. And I don't know if that struck you, but imagine your life if you were guaranteed to have right judgment in all things. Of all the things that we could ask of the Holy Spirit, it's interesting that this is the way the prayer is phrased. And yet that's actually what we're going to be talking about this evening. We're going to talk about how the presence of the Spirit uses baptism to enable us to have right judgment. So it sort of pulls all of this together. We're looking at Paul's letter to the Colossians to understand this more. This is a series that we started after Easter. And the central question of the series centers on the resurrection. If the resurrection actually happened, in other words, if it's not just a nice idea or some fanciful creation of the followers of Jesus in the centuries following his death, if it actually happened, what difference does it make? And that's based on this premise. That if the resurrection did not happen, if it's just a nice idea, then I would strongly recommend you leave Christianity and go find another religion or another philosophy. It is simply too difficult. It asks too much. It's far too inconvenient to be a Christian if there is no resurrection. As Paul said, if the resurrection didn't happen, all of this is empty. On the other hand, if it did actually happen, if Jesus Christ actually rose from death, which I believe happened, and many of you believe happened, that changes everything. So the question is, what changes as a result? And so Paul has written this letter to Colossians laying out what does life in light of the resurrection look like? And we get into the meat of that in this passage, chapter 2, verses 6 to 15.

Because here's where we begin to get at Paul's major concern, the reason he wrote the letter. And that's because there are things happening in the Colossian church that worry him. False teaching is being propagated, and it's threatening to tear people away from the truth of the gospel. And so here he issues a warning about that. So we'll look at the warning, and then he offers a way out. So what is the warning? What is the danger? And then what is the way out? That's our outline. So let's pray for the Lord to lead us. Our Father in heaven, you have sent the Holy Spirit to take things that are hard to understand or unclear and make them known and make them clear. And it's because of the presence of your Holy Spirit that we can have hope that when we open these written words, that your Spirit can use these written words and the ministry of broken vessels to lead us into the presence of the living

Word, Jesus Christ. And that is the encounter for which we came. That through the ministry of the Spirit, we would see Jesus face to face, that he would minister to us exactly in the ways that we need.

[4:18] And so we ask that, Lord, for our good, but ultimately for your glory. In your Son's name. Amen. So first of all, the warning that Paul issues. What's his concern? I want to bring you up to speed and give you a little context about where we are in the letter. Paul is writing a letter to a church in Colossa full of primarily Gentile converts, non-Jewish converts. And these are people he's

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never met. He's never visited this church in person.

He led a man to faith named Epaphras. And Epaphras then went and planted this church. So Paul is the spiritual grandfather. But he's most likely in prison at this point. And so he's writing to people he's never met. And he's heard of their faith. He says in the opening verses that he's heard of the genuine way that the gospel is bearing fruit in their lives. And for the first few verses of chapter one, he simply gives thanks. Next time you write an email or a letter, take a couple of verses and just give thanks for the person that you're writing. It'll make a huge difference. He just gives thanks for them. And then beginning around verse nine, going through verse 23, he tells them how he's praying for them. He says, he says, I pray for you continually that you would be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, that you would be filled with the joy that comes from knowing the Lord. And then from the end of chapter one into the first few verses of chapter two, verse five of chapter two, he says, all of this, your faith, the fruit that is being grown up in your midst, the joy that you are experiencing in your faith, all of that is the result of the apostolic ministry. In other words, Paul and other apostles, they've suffered, they've struggled, they've persevered in order to deliver the clear teaching of Jesus in an unspoiled way, like precious cargo.

We've given this to you. And he's saying, now hold on to it. Don't deviate from it. And that brings us up to verse six. You heard about that last week. Dan preached on it. Therefore, as you received Jesus Christ, the Lord, so walk in him, just as we taught you to do, continue down that road. Don't go to the left or right. Stick to what we told you. That's what the letter is about. And now we see why this matters so much. You say, well, why? Who cares? What difference does it make? Well, here's the warning in verse eight. See to it here. Listen to this. 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. That's the warning. So what's he saying? Has anybody ever seen the movie 12 Years a Slave? Are you familiar with it? It's an amazing movie if you haven't seen it. It's a true, based on a true story, an account that we have of a man named Solomon who was an African-American man born free, born in New York as a free person. And nevertheless, when he was in Washington, D.C., he was kidnapped, he was taken captive, and then sold into slavery. And he had to spend 12 years of his life as a slave.

I mean, that's a horrific idea to think about that actually happening to somebody who's free, who has the papers to prove it. And the thing is, that kind of thing happened more often than we would like to believe. You would have a free person who had the papers to prove it. They would be abducted. The papers would be torn up. They would be sold as a slave. And once that happened, it was very, very, very hard to regain your freedom. Well, in a way, this is the warning that Paul is giving.

He's saying, you have been made free people. You've been born again through the gospel as free people. Beware, because there are people in your community, there are teachings, worldviews, philosophies, that will take you captive and send you back into the very slavery that you've just been freed from.

[8:30] Be very careful. This is happening, he says. Now, I want to be clear that this isn't knocking philosophy in general. You know, some people will say, well, this means that all philosophy is evil.

Absolutely not. That's not what it's saying. In fact, I would commend all of you to the study of philosophy. The basic tools of philosophy are enormously useful for Christians when it comes to articulating and understanding the teachings of Scripture. So, philosophy is enormously useful. What this is talking about is likened more to worldviews, right? It says there are certain worldviews being offered. There are certain ways of making sense of the world that are being offered that are dangerous. They're empty. They're deceitful. They will take you captive and lead you back into the slavery that you've escaped from. And this is a serious warning because the worst kind of slavery slavery is a slavery of the mind and a slavery of the heart. So, it doesn't matter if you're living a technically free life. If you're a slave in your heart and a slave in your mind, then you're not free. And so, this is a very serious warning. And so, we need to understand how does this actually happen? How does a way of thinking take us captive? That sounds kind of like a strange idea.

And in order to understand how this happens, you have to understand two things about human nature. And if you ever read or are familiar with Paul David Tripp, he's a therapist and a teacher and a pastor. He's very helpful on this front. But there are two things that we need to understand about how we work as human beings. The first is this, that you and I, we do not live our lives based on the facts of our life experience. We don't live our lives based on the objective facts of our lived

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experience.
We live our lives based on our interpretation of those facts. Right? That's the thing that makes the difference. How do you interpret your daily experiences? So, let me give you a tiny example of what I'm talking about. Say you pull out your phone and you send a text to somebody you know and you say, hey, you want to hang out tomorrow night? Send. And you wait, you wait, you wait, set the phone down, pick it back up, check, set it down, and the person doesn't respond. And the rest of the day, that person doesn't respond. Well, there's the objective fact. That's something that has just happened, an event in your life. How do you interpret it? So, there are some people in this room who, if you send a text to somebody, you want to hang out and you didn't hear back, you would immediately assume, well, they probably lost their phone. Or maybe their phone's broken. Maybe their texting isn't working. Maybe they're in a meeting or maybe they're busy and they just forgot to get back to me. Any number of excuses that you come up with to justify why that didn't happen. And then you literally will not think about it again. You'll go on the rest of your day and you won't give it another thought. Well, I'm sure something came up. No big deal. You go right on with your day. Now, there are other people in this room.
[11:34] If you send a text like that out to somebody and you never hear back, what do you think? They don't like me. Right? They're trying to tell me something here. They didn't write back because they, and I feel like an idiot, and I just put myself out there and took this huge social risk and they're not even going to respond to me. They must really not like me. Now, I feel so stupid for even suggesting that because obviously they don't want to hang out and they're trying to give me this hint. And unlike that other person who just goes on and they don't give it another thought, that is all you think about for the rest of the day. Right? It ruins your day. Maybe it ruins the next week. Right? Why didn't they write back? I'm so hurt. I'm so crushed. Why didn't they do it?

They're so mean. Right? All those thoughts. So you have one fact, one event, but two completely different ways of interpreting it. And the first way preserves your freedom. Right? I'm going to go on with my day. I'm not going to think about it. Sure something came up. Not a big deal. The other way of interpreting it takes you captive. Right? You start thinking about it, dwelling on it, analyzing, overthinking it. Right? Why did that happen? You've been taken captive. Now, this is a tiny example, little example. But I'm sure this kind of thing has happened to almost everybody in this room.
Tiny example, but what we need to understand is we also do this on a much larger level. And what happens is that we make these interpretations of our lives day in and day out. And over time, we are constructing a worldview. A way of interpreting all of life. A way of making sense of all of life. Same basic principle, but applied to everything. And that worldview, that way of thinking, dramatically affects how we feel. How we then respond to our lives. And ultimately, these things are determining whether or not we are living out our freedom or living as functional slaves to this, that, or the other. So that's the first thing. We don't live life based on the objective facts. We live life based on our interpretation. And this, by the way, isn't distinct Christian teaching. This is something that any therapist worth their salt is going to tell you.
So that's the first thing. Second thing is this. We are always being bombarded by the opinions of other people in terms of how we should interpret our lives. Well-meaning family members, well-meaning friends, well-meaning movie makers, well-meaning advertisers, music, books, podcasts, you name it.
We are flooded, inundated, living in a cacophony of opinions, of people trying to assert their sense of how we should make sense of our lives. Here's how you should make sense of your marriage. Here's how you should make sense of parenting. Here's how you should make sense of dating. Here's how you should make sense of your job. Here's how you should make sense of your feelings of rejection.
[14:25] Here's how you should make sense of your anxiety. Again and again and again, people are offering their opinions. And so we're not interpreting our lives in a neutral, objective way. We are constantly having to sort through hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of opinions and decide which is accurate and which is not. So to summarize, we live our lives based on the way we interpret our experiences and those interpretations are constantly being influenced by thousands of outside opinions.

And Paul is saying, beware. Beware of that. Because he says many of those opinions that are coming from very well-meaning people are nevertheless empty and deceitful. They claim to give

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you an accurate sense of reality, but they don't. And they skew your perception and they can take you captive.
So this is the first point. This is the warning. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit. So then what's the way out? If that's the warning, then what do we do about this? And if this isn't quite making sense to you, we're going to talk about the way out and then I'll give hopefully a couple of examples that will kind of help the penny drop a little bit. But let's look at what's the way out according to Paul. And the way out is this. What we need with all these opinions coming in and us trying to make sense of our lives on a day-to-day basis, what we need is some kind of objective standard to gauge these opinions against, right? Something to let us know whether or not they're true or false. Something solid that we can count on. Do you know what a plumb line is?
If you're building a wall or building and you think the wall is vertical and then you pull out a plumb line and it's a string with a little conical shaped weight on one end and you hold it and it shows you true vertical. And you hold that up next to your wall and it will show you is your wall truly vertical or is it leaning in one way or another? Is it skewed? So you can't tell unless you have that objective standard. We need a plumb line to do the same thing for our interpretations of life. Is my interpretation accurate or is it skewed in one way or another? I need something to hold it up against.
[16:46] And what Paul is saying is that that plumb line is the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That that is our plumb line. So you say, well how do I know that? Why should Jesus get to be that in my life? And Paul spends the rest of our passage giving us three reasons why we should look to Jesus alone to help us make sense of our life experience. Why should he be the gauge? Well, reason number one. Jesus is the only one with the authority to define reality. Right? Family, friends, commercials, movies, right? They all have opinions. But nobody in your life, despite what they may say, well-meaning friends and family, despite what they may say, nobody has authority to define your reality.

They can offer their opinion, but nobody has the authority to actually define your reality for you. But Paul says Jesus is different. In verse 9 it says, for in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. So he says when you're dealing with Jesus, you're dealing with God. This is God in flesh. And then he goes on in verse 10, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. What does that say? Jesus has the final say. He's the head of all rule and authority. If he's the one, to put it simply, who made all of this, then he's the one who has a right to define it.
So he is different. He has that kind of authority to define reality as he sees fit, because he made it. That's the first thing Paul says. Second thing he says, second reason, Jesus has joined our lives to his.
[18:32] It says in verse 11, So what's that saying in plain English?

For those people who are baptized, this is how it connects to what's going to happen in a little while. Those people, their lives become grafted into or joined to the life of Jesus Christ.
Right? So everybody in this room who's been baptized, your life has become joined with Jesus. So it is as though you have experienced his life and his death and his resurrection.
Those things that are true for him are now true of you. Your lives have become merged. So Jesus joins our life to his own.
So all of these things that are true of Jesus are now true of us. By the way, this is an aside, but this is also where we understand that baptism is the continued practice. In the Old Testament, we see circumcision.
[19:44] In the New Testament, we see circumcision and we begin to practice baptism. This is why we extend this practice, this what we call a right of inclusion to the children of believers.

We see that happening in the Old Testament, and so we do that in the New Testament church. Now we don't believe that it is salvific. We don't believe that this will save Juniper. But what we believe is that God wants us to include her, because of who her parents are, in the covenant community.
In the visible community. And then we will pray altogether that by means of that inclusion, she will come to genuine faith. The Bible differentiates between external circumcision and circumcision of the heart.
External baptism and a washing with the power of the Holy Spirit and a cleansing of sin. And so we pray that the spiritual reality would follow, even as we are obedient to the outward and visible sign.

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So we see this happening here, and what this shows us is that Jesus joins our lives to his. And so if anybody should have a say in how we make sense of our lives, it should be him.
[20:55] Right? Because he has made our lives and his life one and the same. So that's the second reason he should be our plumb line. So reason one, he's the only one with that kind of authority. Reason two, he has joined our lives to his.

And reason three, very simply, Jesus has already set us free. His whole aim, his whole goal is our freedom. That's why he came.
It says in verse 13, And you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.
This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. Listen to verse 15. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.
So what is that saying? Every voice out there that makes a claim about you. I don't know how much you struggle with shame.
[22:00] I don't know how much you struggle with self-criticism. I don't know how much you struggle with self-hatred, self-loathing. But I know there are people here who are struggling with those things. You've got an enormous amount of opinions weighing in on your value and your worth.

You've got an enormous amount of things that want to become your master. What this is saying is that all of those false tyrants, those false voices, those false masters, that Jesus, because of what he did on the cross, has utterly rendered them powerless.
In other words, they have no say over who you are anymore. And the language that's used is really strong. All of those voices that condemn you, that shame you, that haunt you, that want to master you, that all of those false tyrants, it says Jesus has stripped them and marched them naked down the street.
That's the image. He didn't just disarm them. He humiliated them. So you need to understand this is where Paul's urgency comes from. You used to be a slave. But Jesus came and he took your slave master and he removed their authority and he stripped them naked and he humiliated them and he marched them down the street for everybody to see.
And now you're telling me that you want to go back into slavery under that master? He's saying, don't do it. Beware. This is the warning.
[23:25] So Jesus is the only one with that kind of authority. He's joined our lives to his and his whole ministry exists to set us free. Therefore, he has the right to help us make sense of our lives.

In other words, to live and to see and to experience life as a free person would. So what does this actually look like in real life? It's kind of esoteric idea.
How does this actually play out on a Monday? Well, I think I have time for maybe one or two examples. I'll give you a couple of examples. Think about the way we think about love.
Take love. Now, some of you are religious. You're here, you're Christians. Other people here are maybe not religious. Maybe you're here as a friend or family or something like that, but maybe you don't consider yourself to be religious.
Well, many people I know, both religious and not, they have a high view of love, particularly romantic love, right? I know a lot. I talk to more and more people who say that romantic love is maybe the greatest thing in life.
[24:23] It's the greatest ideal. So say you're married. Some of you are married. Some of you want to get married. Say you've been married for a few years. It started out great. But then things get complicated.

And there are lots of chores to do. And you've got to pay bills. And you realize that you don't get along. And things that used to be kind of cute are driving you crazy. A few years later, right? That thing that you used to kind of like shrug your shoulders at now like makes you think murderous thoughts.
It will happen. Right? And you say, I can't believe I feel this way about this. But my little snookums has become this object of deep resentment and hate. Right? And how did we get here? Right? And that in love feeling that kind of got you through the first few years is no longer there at 3 a.m. with a crying baby. It just does not exist. You cannot muster it up. And you try to rekindle the romance. And you try to, you know, maybe like go out for a date night.

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But then you realize you're $100 into a babysitter before you even leave your house. You say, I don't want to go out for a date night. Right? Date night is not romantic. I'm just thinking about the money we don't have. Right? And you try to rekindle and you can't.
[25:24] So what do you do? You ask your friends. You ask your, you know, people around you. You look into the movies and you, okay, what's the prevailing wisdom about where I am right now? You know what a lot of people will say? You need to find the love of your life.

If you're with the right person, that love will never die. If that love dies, then you need to go looking for it.
Right? And that sounds like conventional wisdom that is true. That if love is the greatest thing, then I need to find it. And if I can't find it here and if we can't rekindle it here, maybe it's a sign that I need to pull out.
Leave this marriage and go looking for it. And many, many people do. Or maybe you're not married and maybe you have this deep fear of getting married. And that in love feeling fades. And then what are you going to do? You're stuck in a marriage where you don't feel any love.
And what does that mean? And I know people that don't get married. They put off marriage for years. Because they're so afraid that they won't find the love of their life. See, this sounds like wisdom.
[26:27] But what we need to understand is that way of thinking is a trap. Because that in love feeling never lasts all the time. It ebbs and it flows and it comes and it goes.

It's like the flowers in the spring. Right? There are times when it is radiant and in full bloom. And other times when they're withering and dying. Right? That's what life does.
And more than we like to admit, a lot of those feelings are based in neurochemistry. You know, it's serotonin and dopamine and oxytocin. That are driving us to feel these feelings.
Right? Comes and goes. And the reason that that way of thinking will take you captive. If you give in to that, you'll be taken captive. Why? Because you'll spend your whole life looking for something that doesn't actually exist.
That's a slave. Working toward a futile goal. Right? So you hold that way of thinking. People say you need to get out. You need to leave. You need to find the love of your life. You take that and you hold it against the plumb line of Jesus.
[27:34] And what does the plumb line of Jesus show us? Life is not ultimately about romantic love. But that can't become the foundation of a relationship.

The foundation of a relationship needs to be the far deeper, truer, sacrificial love that we see embodied in Jesus Christ.
That self-donation. And how do we know that? Because that's the foundation that Jesus built in our relationship with him. The foundation is his willingness to donate himself. To give himself.
He says that's the foundation of a relationship. But here's the good news. That doesn't replace romantic love. It enables it. It empowers it. If you build a relationship on daily willingness to die to yourself, then those daily deaths make a rich compost of decay.
Right? And that compost builds up. And then out of that fertile soil, romantic love will blossom. It will blossom. But the plumb line of Jesus shows us that sacrificial love is the primary love.
[28:40] And romantic love is subservient to that love. So you hold that up and you realize, no, I'm not going to buy that. That will take me captive. And you reject it because you have a standard.

Right? So that's how we think about love in the plumb line of Jesus. Let's take one more example. We've got time for one more. Independence. Independence. How do we think about success in our culture?
Right? I think a lot of us define success along the lines of independence. The more successful you are in life, the less you need from other people. You're independent from your family.
You're independent from... You don't need anything. People say, well, a successful life means that I'm self-sufficient. Got what I need. I don't need other people helping me out.
I don't need religion. A lot of people say, if you need those kinds of things, that makes you weak. That's evidence that you're not very successful if you're so needy all the time. Again, we need to understand that's a trap.
[29:39] Why is it a trap? Well, I'm going to tell you something that most of you already know. Life is way too hard to live alone. It's way too hard. Right? People misquote the Bible.

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And they say, well, doesn't the Bible say that God will never give us more than we can handle? No. The Bible does not say that. I don't know where that came from. But it's not in the Bible. The Bible virtually guarantees that life will, on a daily basis, be way too overwhelming.
Right? It's way harder than we can deal with on our own. And so you hold that way of thinking. Right? That I need to be independent. I need to be totally self-sufficient. And that's what a successful life means.
You hold that against the plumb line of Jesus and you realize that's not actually a Christian value. That's an American value. And the only reason that we as Americans can even think that way is because we're probably the wealthiest country ever to have existed.
The most privileged country ever to have been. So we have the luxury and the privilege of thinking that self-sufficiency and autonomy and independence are somehow ultimate values.
[30:40] No. You hold that against the plumb line of Jesus and Jesus shows us what? You weren't made for independence. You were made for interdependence. Success doesn't mean living life as a self-sustaining individual.

You're made for community. Right? Success isn't being totally independent. Success is learning how to serve and to depend on other people.
That is a successful life. We need one another. That's why the Bible talks about us being a body where every part works properly. So these are just two examples.
But what I want to encourage you to do is all of us in this room, everybody is a theologian. Everybody is a philosopher. We are always stepping back, assessing our lives, assessing our relationships, assessing our circumstances, and trying to interpret them and make meaning of them.
Some of you are doing it right now. You've got things that you're trying to make sense of. Whether it is your job or your friendships or your family or your marriage or your desire for marriage or your kids or your desire for success or your fear of failure or the regrets that you reflect on in the late hours of the night or the anxieties and fears that threaten you of the unknown that awaits you in your future.
[32:02] Whatever it is that you are dwelling on, know this. You are not living in response to objective facts. You are living in response to your interpretation. So the question is, where are those interpretations coming from?

And what will it look like? Imagine your life if you begin to take all of that and filter it through the lens of the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
How would that change how you live? How would that right your judgment, enable you to see things as they really are? Let's pray.

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