

# Citizenship, Slavery, and Kingdom Confusion - Colossians 2:6-15

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 14 July 2019

Preacher: Alan Giles

[ 0 : 00 ] The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.

Whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior, but now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you wholly in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation, if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.

This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

[ 1 : 27 ] Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

I have become a servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness, the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people.

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

To this end, I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.

My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

[ 2 : 48 ] I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments, for though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit, and delight to see how disciplined you are, and how firm your faith in Christ is.

And just continuing from verse 6, which is the passage I will be preaching from.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you are taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world, rather than on Christ.

For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

[ 3 : 52 ] In him you are also circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men, but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

When you were dead in your sins, and in your uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code with his regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us.

He took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Father, thank you that you have caused this letter to be written to the Colossians, and passed down to us that we can read and learn so much of Jesus.

We thank you, Lord, indeed, that you are supreme over all things. You have shown us that we were enemies in our minds because of our sin, because of our evil behaviour, and yet you have gloriously reconciled us to yourself on the cross.

[ 5 : 09 ] We thank you that we have this opportunity of learning. We thank you for Alan. Thank you for bringing himself and Cassie and the family to Caragalline to continue that teaching. And I pray, indeed, as he opens up your word to teach, that, indeed, he would be a workman approved unto you, correctly handling the word of truth.

I pray, indeed, that our desire would be to know you more through the words of Scripture, that we'd be open to being corrected and rebuked and disciplined, but also that we would grow, that we would become more like our Saviour, so we commit Alan to you as he preaches, and our own hearts and minds as we listen.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Well, it was a night just like any other night on the western shores of Britain during the turn of the 5th century, and the residents of the quiet village were sleeping soundly as a ferocious, painted-up band of Irish pirates snuck ashore.

Before anyone really knew what had happened, the pirates had ransacked the town. They'd pillaged the people's treasures and headed back to sea with a handful of hostages.

These hostages would soon be sold at a slave market, where they would be put to work in the Irish countryside as house servants or farmers or even shepherds.

[ 6 : 44 ] Now, on this particular night in around 405 A.D., there was a 16-year-old named Sukkot, the son of a wealthy British family who had been captured, who was then sold into slavery, who then became a Christian while he was a slave here in Ireland and changed his name to Patrick.

And while we know many things about Patrick's life and ministry, or I should say we think we know many things about Patrick's life and ministry here in Ireland, we don't often stop to think about how he arrived here originally as a captured hostage who was sold into slavery.

And when we think about it, we might think, well, Patrick, that's so uncommon. What happened to him. But slavery was not uncommon in the Roman Empire. It was not uncommon during Patrick's day.

It was certainly not uncommon during Paul's day. In fact, the further you were towards the edge of the Roman Empire, the more likely it was that you would be captured by pirates and sold into slavery.

And if you weren't near seas, then you could be captured by brigands or land pirates. They would steal you away in the middle of the night and rush you to the slave market where they would sell you into slavery.

[ 8 : 04 ] And Colossae was at the edge of the Roman Empire, much like Britain was during the 5th century. In the 1st century, Colossae is at the northern edge of the Roman Empire.

And it would be a very real threat to have brigands come in in the middle of the night and to ransack your town and to take people as hostages to sell them into slavery.

Like I said, slavery was very common during the Roman Empire. Most people estimate that somewhere between 20 to 25 percent of the population were slaves in the Roman Empire.

Extremely common. In fact, the 1st century proposal in the Senate that slaves wear certain clothing was shot down. It was voted against because there was a fear that the slaves might find out how numerous they were, how much power they actually had because of their sheer population within the empire.

Now granted, life as a slave could vary from owner to owner. Some slaves were high-ranking administrators within a household or town. Some would take care of people's finances.

[ 9 : 17 ] Some had excellent lives, but the reality was they were still slaves. Some were scribes. The Bibles we have, the papyri that's come down to us, was written by many slaves.

That was their job within a household, was to copy Bible verses, to copy records. Some were cooks. Some were skilled craftsmen. Some were teachers. Some were nannies.

Some worked in mines. Some worked in fields. Some were even sent into battle. It was very common that a quarter of a population of any town would be slaves.

The legal status of a slave was that of a thing. Aristotle, the famed Aristotle, defined slavery as living property. He said that the slave is a living tool and the tool is a lifeless slave.

A slave had no legal rights. They were subject to the absolute power of their master. Even a slave woman who had a child, that child would not belong to her.

[10:20] It belonged to the owner. And because slavery was so common, and the life expectancy of a slave in the Roman Empire was so short, there were somewhere between 250,000 to 400,000 new slaves needed every year in the Roman Empire.

A massive amount of people being sold into slavery or born into slavery. Now, one of the top sources for obtaining slaves during this time was piracy and brigandage.

Stealing into towns. Capturing people. And selling them into slavery. In fact, someone like Barabbas in John 18, we read that Barabbas is let go instead of Jesus. The shocking thing about that is Barabbas was a brigand.

He was someone who would do this. He would sneak into towns at night and capture people and sell them into slavery. So that's a part of the shock of why they would let this guy be released. Now, normally the Romans relied upon their local city governments to police the rural areas and keep them clear of brigands or pirates.

But the more remote areas were less successful at this. And since there was a very popular, well-run, efficient slave market in Ephesus, Colossian citizens were very much at risk of being captured and run down to Ephesus and sold into slavery.

[11:49] Now, why do we start with that topic? You're probably wondering. Well, something that Paul says here in this passage caught my eye this week. It kind of comes out of nowhere. In verse 8.

In verse 8 he says, See to it that no one takes you captive. As I thought about, what would that phrase mean to a first century Colossian?

There's a lot of cultural and historical differences that have happened since then. See to it would be, Be on your guard. Keep watch. It's translated a lot of times in the New Testament.

Even Jesus says, Be on your guard. See to it. Keep watch. I've seen several towers around Ireland. They're looking out for something. Paul says, Be on your guard that nobody takes you captive.

And being taken captive during the first century, especially in a town like Colossae, literally meant for someone to come in and steal you and take you as a person that would be sold back for ransom or sold into slavery.

[12:55] So if we're first century Colossians listening to this letter, we've heard Paul say that we are God's people, that Jesus is our Lord, that He's creator of all things, including new creation, His body, the church, that we are being matured more and more into His likeness, that in verses 6-7, as we just saw, we're having been rooted in Him, we're being grown and strengthened, and then out of nowhere, Paul says, Now, be on your guard lest someone should capture you and enslave you.

And we'd be thinking, That's right, Paul. Finally, it's time to get practical here. Brigands are an issue. We need to do something about the brigands. We need to stop letting people get captured and sold into slavery.

But Paul's not talking about brigands. The danger that Paul's describing, the thing he says that the Christians in Colossae need to be on the guard and looking out for, is not necessarily brigands, but this thing called the empty or hollow and deceitful philosophy that some are peddling in Colossae. And please note, Paul is not being vague here. He's used striking language to grab their attention. Be on your guard.

People are trying to capture you and enslave you using the hollow and deceptive philosophy.

[14:31] He's being very specific to this church. It's interesting, historically, we see that the region where Colossae is, the Lycus Valley it's called, had once been destroyed by an earthquake.

I don't know if you've seen the earthquakes happening where I'm from, in California. The whole state is about to fall into the ocean, I think, which might not be such a bad thing for that state. I hate to say it, but that's true.

But a huge earthquake had shaken Colossae and the whole area had been destroyed. And Rome needed that area. They needed the agriculture and the wool from the sheep that had come out of that area.

They had some special dyes and a few products that was good for the Roman market. So what they did is they imported about 2,000 Jewish families to the area. So roughly 10,000 Jewish people were imported to the area.

They were mixed with Greco-Roman citizens. And in three big towns, Colossae being one of them, you had about a third to a half of the population was Jewish. The rest were kind of Greco-Roman.

[15:32] And what happened over the years, about 100 years before Paul's writing this letter, is that all of their religious stuff had started to mix together. And so we have this crazy mixture of religion that's there when Christianity arrives.

And this mixture is what's called the philosophy. It's what Paul's speaking to. And it's deceitful and hollow, he says. It's got Jewish tradition mixed with pagan magic, mixed with kind of this Greek cultic religious ideas, and then Roman empirical deism.

That is to worship the Roman emperor. So we've got this unbelievable mixture of all these religious ideas poured into one town, and then Christianity comes in. And before Christianity gets there, it's amazing.

We can read the papyri, we can look at the inscriptions, there's magical chants to angels. Some of those angels are in the Old Testament. Michael and Gabriel. There's amulets that are being made with inscriptions on them calling for those angels to help them.

There's all these traditions that have been stacked one on top of another. And then Christianity comes in. And the Roman Empire, it's interesting to note, they were rigidly traditional with their religion.

[16:53] Rigidly traditional. But ironically, open to new innovation. So as long as you kept the same traditions that were proven over time, you could add new stuff if it worked.

And that's what happened when Christianity came. All these old traditions had to stay. All these old chants had to remain.

These amulets had to still have some power. And then we could add Christianity as long as it worked. And Paul says, that's complete nonsense.

It's empty and it's deceitful. But if you were a Christian in Colossae, you've got to really think about this. If you're a Christian in Colossae, it'd be very tempting, especially if something started to go wrong, not to start to second guess.

your life in Christ. See, all these magical chants and these amulets and these things that have come together, they're for success. So if you're a Christian and your crops aren't doing as well as your neighbor's crops, maybe he's got a tradition or a superstition or a chant or an amulet that maybe I should have that even though I'm a Christian.

[18:21] Or if you need protection, there's all these chants. There's all these little things I can do to just get a little bit of protection. Safety for my loved ones.

There's a ton of archaeological evidence for getting someone to fall in love with you. Oh, if I could only have, and it's crazy to read them, nothing's really changed over time.

If I could only have this woman, if I could only have this guy see me and fall in love with me, and then you do these chants and you call on these angels and you write it all out, and can I still do that if I'm a Christian?

This would be very tempting for the Colossians, citizen. It would be very hard not to add some of this back in to your Christianity. But Paul says, it's empty and deceitful.

And he uses strong language to say, that stuff will capture you and it will put you into slavery. He says, it's empty.

[19:26] It has no real value. But it pretends that it does. And what we'll call all that stuff, we'll just refer to it today as human tradition and magical superstition.

That's really, we can put it all into those words. Paul says, the human tradition and the magical superstition that people are peddling to you Christians is emptiness compared to Christ who is fullness.

And that's what he does in verses 9 through 12 is he starts to compare the fullness of Christ to the emptiness of these other things. He says in verse 9, for in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form.

And in Christ you have been brought to fullness. And then he goes on to say in a very Old Testament sort of way, in a Jewish sort of way, that Christ has made us, that is Christians, his people.

And that's what he's doing when he talks about circumcision and baptism. Circumcision was a sign that you were a Jewish person. That you were one of God's people who belonged to the nation of Israel. And under the new covenant that's changed to baptism.

[ 20 : 34 ] So he says, those who have been baptized in Christ are God's people. Because baptism has replaced circumcision. It's an outward sign of the resurrection we have in Christ.

And that's why Christians baptize. It's a new covenant sign which signifies what has happened to us because of our faith. We've been buried with Christ. So when someone goes into the water, they've been buried with Christ.

A very pictorial, visual image of what's happened when Christ went into the grave. So too, the old self goes into the water. When we come up out of the water, it's the visual imagery of being resurrected into new life, a new creation.

As well as it looks forward to our final resurrection and glorification when Christ returns. That even those of us who fall asleep, as Paul says, that those of us who are put into the ground before Christ returns, we look forward to being raised from the ground the same way Christ was.

And Paul's using circumcision and baptism to say, we are, as Christians, God's people. And again, this concept to a Colossian is very important, especially when compared to that of slavery.

[ 21 : 44 ] He says, God's people are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. And citizenship in the Roman Empire is the absolute opposite of slavery.

Citizenship in the Roman Empire was everything you longed for. It was everything you wanted to be. Where a slave had no rights, a citizen had every right.

Where a slave couldn't even go where they wanted to go, a citizen could move anywhere they wanted to freely within the empire. A slave could be grabbed and searched and seized for any reason. You could not do that to a citizen.

A slave didn't even have the right to have their own legal representation. A citizen, as we see with Paul in Acts, has the right to say, I want to see the emperor. I want to be tried in front of the emperor himself.

And so Paul used this language to set up the difference between slavery and citizenship. And he said, the Christians in Colossae, they are citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

[ 22 : 48 ] That that's been marked by baptism, that they are Christ's people. Therefore, be on your guard because since you are citizens of the kingdom of heaven, this empty, deceitful philosophy wants to come and grab you and re-enslave you to its kingdoms of human tradition and magical superstition.

And Paul says, what those kingdoms do is they deceive you. They ignore who we are as citizens of God's kingdom. And they pretend to be able to do something that they cannot do.

And Paul lays this out in verses 13-14. First he says, when you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh.

He's using slave language again. Many times he says we were slaves to sin. Here he says, you're dead to sin. God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness which stood against us and condemned us.

He has taken it away nailing it to the cross. Now, the cultural difference is important again because if you were a slave your freedom could be purchased.

[ 24 : 02 ] And if your freedom was purchased whether somehow you saved up enough money or someone came in to redeem you to ransom you they would take the fact that you had been set free and they would literally nail that to the temple door in the city where your freedom was bought.

It would be announced publicly. Alan Giles is free. No longer a slave. And then it would be written in the temple book of life that you were no longer a slave in that city or in the Roman Empire in general.

So look at what Paul says that our legal indebtedness was nailed to the cross. the record of our being set free from the slavery of human tradition and magical superstition was literally nailed to the cross and announced for all of the empire to see these people God's people have been set free.

They are citizens of the kingdom of heaven and Paul says with that in mind why would we ever want to go back into slavery of a subpar kingdom? When it's public record that we are citizens of

God's kingdom which is the kingdom that is greater than all kingdoms why would we ever want to be sold as slaves to a subpar kingdom or give ourselves freely to that kingdom?

It's interesting we even have records in the first century of court cases where citizens were captured and sold at a slave market. One court case caught my eye that a few men were captured they were sold into slavery and when they get to their new place they make a big deal you cannot enslave us because we are Roman citizens.

[ 25 : 54 ] And the governor sends for the records from their hometown and sure enough the temple records reveal in the temple book of life and freedom that they were citizens.

And so those captors those brigands were executed for empty and deceitful enslavement because you cannot take a citizen and sell them into slavery.

So not only does the philosophy in Colossae ignore who the Colossians are as God's kingdom people but they also pretend to be able to do something they cannot actually do.

Verse 15 Paul spells that out. He says Christ has taken the enslaver's weapons he has shamed them publicly and triumphed over them on the cross.

And when you triumphed over somebody in the Roman times you literally shamed them publicly. You took their weapons you put them in line behind you and you marched through town you received a celebration and everybody booed and jeered them they were publicly shamed and everybody knew that's the losing side right there.

[ 27 : 13 ] Paul says Christ disarmed all the other kingdoms all the other authorities all the other powers Christ disarmed them he made a public spectacle of them on the cross he put them behind him in the resurrection he marched them through the streets and put them to shame showing everybody that they had no power over him.

See that tends to happen when someone rises from the dead. That anybody who's killed you is now put to shame when you rise from the dead and you march through cities and you let people see who you are everything that ever stood against you has been disarmed and put to shame and if you belong to that king if you're a citizen of that kingdom well now you're really something aren't you?

Because you belong to the true king the king of kings. Paul says anything other anything other than Christianity whether it's human tradition or magical superstition it's powerless it's empty it's deceitful it's time has passed it's authority has been revoked it's power has been removed.

That's what he's saying right there. I was thinking what would that be like if we were to sell ourselves to the Roman Empire again?

We get some crazy things to vote on in California I don't know politics very well in Ireland but I know in California stuff shows up on the ballot and some of it I read it and I think how on earth did this make it to a ballot?

[ 28 : 48 ] Why are we voting on this? But I was thinking I can't imagine I cannot imagine if something showed up on the ballot should America sell themselves into slavery to the Roman Empire again?

I would be shocked if someone wanted to vote yes on that. I would think the same in Ireland if it showed up on the ballot should we sell our whole country into slavery to the Roman Empire I would think somebody would say the Roman Empire doesn't exist anymore what are you talking about it's no and someone could say well Rome is still there yeah but the Empire has got no weapons the Empire's time has passed the Empire's been put to shame why would we sell ourselves to the Roman Empire and Paul says in the same way that it would be utter insanity for any of today's nations to sell themselves into slavery to an empire whose time has passed so too would be absolutely crazy for a Christian to sell themselves into the slavery of the kingdoms of this world why would we willingly go back to that life now I'm going to guess that for most

Christians the reality is we don't we don't willingly go back into slavery I doubt I highly doubt anybody woke up any day this week and said I think I would like to sell myself to the kingdoms of human tradition and magical superstition today I highly doubt you have that thought but the reality is we slip into it don't we reality is things happen in life and before we know it we find ourselves a bit enslaved we find that we've been captured by something other than Christ and I thought a lot about that this week how does that happen how do God's people citizens of God's kingdoms how do we find ourselves enslaved to the things of this world and what I would say is we find ourselves in a place of what I just call kingdom confusion we forget who we are in Christ we forget that the world around us has no power or authority our eyes kind of come off of

Jesus and they go towards the things of this world we get confused about what's up what's down what's left what's right we start to compare our lives to others right like the Colossians maybe we look at somebody else's crops and we go what are they doing better than me or we look at somebody else's healthy family and we say what's going on there that I don't have and we lose sight of the kingdom and we get this kingdom confusion that things that shouldn't have priority start to take priority in our lives and I think the best remedy for that is just what we will call kingdom immersion if we flip over to Psalm 73 it's the best illustration I can ever find in scripture we won't go through the whole thing but I would encourage you to at some point this week just read through Asaph's Psalm here in Psalm 73 because what happens in verses 1 and 2 and if you have a red bible it's page 586 page 586 in verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 73 the author just says surely God is good to

Israel that's God's people in this time to those who are pure in heart but as for me my feet had almost slipped I had nearly lost my foothold and what he's describing here is the beginning of what we just said kingdom confusion and in verses 3 through 15 he's really starting to look at the world around him and say what's going on why are the wicked people prospering have you ever thought that I guarantee you've probably worked with somebody and thought that person is so terrible and everything goes their way what's going on and he's starting to look at that and he's going how come they don't have as many physical struggles as God's people have how can they have such evil imaginations and that's okay how can they threaten others and that's okay how can they say such terrible things and store up so much pride for themselves how can they speak so plainly against [33:13] God and nothing happens and in verse 13 and 14 he even starts to question I've kept my heart pure but has that been in vain have I washed my hands in innocence and he starts to look at his life and go I get afflicted all these terrible things happen to me that's just kingdom confusion is what we can call that and it happens so subtly and it happens so quickly it's like those thieves in the night it's like those pirates coming in it's like those brigands sneaking in and before we know it we've been completely confused and we're focusing on our status in the wrong kingdom and we become enslaved the remedy for that we see it happen in psalm 73 verses 16 and 17 he just says when I tried to understand all this it troubled me deeply until I entered the sanctuary of God then I understood their final destiny and I just call that kingdom immersion he says all these things they troubled me essentially he says

I became so confused when I stepped out of the kingdoms of man and I stepped into God's sanctuary and it all started to make sense again he starts to remember here's who I am as God's person here's who I am as a member of God's household here's who I am as a citizen of God's kingdom we don't have the literal temple anymore but it's far better we have God's spirit within us we have God's word in front of us we have God's people surrounding us we become God's holy temple right here as a church and we can literally be immersed in God's kingdom culture together and remind each other who we are in Christ what we were bought out from I think we're saying bought with the precious blood of the cross that the debt that we owed was literally nailed to the cross that our freedom's been publicly declared and we continue to remind each of this and keep each other immersed in kingdom culture together

I've got on the back of your sheet here just some thoughts on kingdom immersion these are just starting thoughts I'd say kingdom life happens formally and informally right a church on Sunday it's a great spot you probably feel when you leave Sunday more like a part of God's kingdom that's that's by design that's how God's designed his church to gather on Sundays we have midweek gatherings we'll talk like we said this week we'll go through the problem of evil how do we share the gospel with people when they ask the number one question that anybody asks about God which is if God's so good how does evil exist what do we say to that and if you have that question and you're not a Christian I invite you to come we'll answer the question right there with you it's fine it's a very valid question but we gather together throughout the week and we study God's word and we talk about God's kingdom we remind each other of who we are in God's kingdom and the church has several ministries too always good to be a part of at least one church ministry during the week because not only are you serving other people but you're serving as God's people immersed in God's kingdom family worship church family meals I would encourage you some of the best things you can do as a member of a local church have a meal ready on Sunday afternoon and if you see anybody new or visiting or hasn't been here in a while just invite them over to your home right after the service it's hard for them to say no you put them right there on the spot so they feel like they

have to so you get them in your house and you just love on them you give them food and you love on them and you laugh with them and you just let them experience kingdom life your worship music reading God's word podcast these are some of my favorites reading good books jep jep yes jep jep yeah bye