

# Filled in Him

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[ 0 : 00 ] Colossians 2, we're going to begin at verse 8 and read to the end of the chapter. Paul writes 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.

For in him, in Christ, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

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. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

[ 1 : 28 ] Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Let no one disqualify you insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, referring to things that all perish as they're used, according to human precepts and teachings?

These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body. But they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of flesh.

Amen? This is God's word. This is a complicated passage. I hope you heard that when we read it. But the reason it's important is because this passage, more than any other in Colossians, shows us why Paul is actually writing this letter.

[ 2 : 57 ] Because it's here, more than anywhere else, that he actually directly addresses the problem that the Colossian church is facing. And if you don't know Paul well, then his critiques here may come as a bit of a surprise.

What angers Paul about what's going on in the Colossian church is not their immorality, it's not the things they're doing outside of church, it's their religion that's actually bothering Paul.

And what we're going to see this morning is that sometimes in order to find the real Jesus, we've got to give up our religion. And that's Paul's point here to the Colossians. In order to find the real Jesus, we've got to give up our religion sometimes.

And so what we're going to look at is two things this morning. Number one, the religion we have to give up. Not all religion, but what religion do we have to give up? And then secondly, the real Jesus that Paul tells us to find.

The religion we have to give up and the real Jesus that Paul tells us to find. And so first, the religion we have to give up. Paul's writing to the Colossian church about the way that they worship. And this is a confusing passage, and it's confusing for a really obvious reason that we all know, which is that when you've only got one side of a conversation, you've only got one side of a conversation, right?

[ 4 : 13 ] Have you ever had someone who passed away in your family, like a grandmother or a great-grandmother, and you're going through all their stuff and you find their letters, maybe a box of all the letters they kept in the 1920s or the 1910s?

I've had that before, and it's so much fun to go through those letters, and it tells you so much about this person that you never knew. But there's always, usually there's always the problem that they only kept one half of the letters.

They only kept the letters that they received. And so what you're doing is you're reading the letters as you're saying, all right, well, if this is what that person wrote, then what's the other half of the conversation? And sometimes it's hard.

Sometimes you say, I wonder, what did they do that made them so angry or something like that? But there's a lot in the letters if you only have one half of the conversation that you can understand. And one way to think about this passage, the fact that we only have one half of the conversation is we have the half that God wanted us to have.

In his providence, he gave us the book of Colossians, and he didn't give us any other context for what was going on in Colossae. But even from the letter, you can kind of tell what is making Paul so angry.

[ 5 : 25 ] You know, for instance, if Paul says something like, see to it that no one takes you captive, you can gather that someone is trying to take the Colossians captive. And if he says, see to it that no one judges you, you can probably gather that in the Colossian church, there were some people that were judging other people.

And what we can tell from this passage, you know, and this is common sense, if you were reading it, what you could tell from this passage is the people in the Colossian church were advocating for beliefs and practices that went beyond what was originally taught to these people in the gospel.

Okay, so for instance, if you look at verse 16, you see he says, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

Now those are all Jewish terms. So probably what was happening was there was this Jewish element within the Colossian church that was saying, if you want to be faithful to God, you've got to pay more attention to the Sabbath or you've got to pay more attention to the new moons.

These were all festivals in the Old Testament. But then, you know, what's interesting is you go to verse 18, okay, and then it's a different set of concerns. So in verse 18, what does it say? Let no one disqualify you insisting on asceticism.

[ 6 : 46 ] Now, do you remember what that word means, asceticism? Asceticism is when you deny something to yourself for some kind of religious purpose. So fasting would be a form of asceticism.

It's when you withhold food from your body in order to grow closer to God. Now, Paul, in other places, he says you should fast. That fasting is actually biblical and Christian.

So that's not what he's talking about here. But there's this asceticism. There is worship of angels. Not a very Jewish thing to do. There is visions that people are having.

And so the picture you get is you've got some people bringing in these Jewish practices. You've got some people, maybe the same people, also bringing in Greek practices from kind of the culture around them.

And they're saying, all right, we're Christians, so we're going to worship Jesus. But there's also some other important things that we're going to do, like worship angels and practice asceticism.

[ 7 : 49 ] In fact, most people think that the asceticism was a form of fasting. Have you ever heard of people that will go on a fast in order to have a religious experience? So some people think that the asceticism here was you fast so that you starve yourself and you begin to have visions or illusions where you think that you speak to angels and that's what's going on here.

Anyway, the point being, you've got this kind of syncretism, this mixing of different religions. And Paul's saying, this is not good. This is actually a really bad idea.

Yeah. And, you know, what was, but Paul knew that, you know, when we look at this, we say, this is weird. No one in their right mind today in a Christian church would worship angels or would practice the kind of asceticism that they're talking about here.

But Paul knew that your baby Christian in Colossae was going to be tempted by this probably because it looked so beautiful and appealing. And you imagine somebody going to this church and, you know, someone stands up and they talk about Jesus and we sing a hymn to Jesus and then maybe a young couple stands up and they give a testimony about how they prayed to an angel and the angel answered their prayer.

And then maybe, you know, one of the elders in the church stands up and he says, you know, I went out into the desert for a week and I fasted and I had a vision where an angel spoke to me and people, you know, this looks like a nice couple and the elderly man looks like a nice guy so we'll trust in this.

[ 9 : 18 ] This is good stuff. This is real religion. But Paul doesn't like it and the way that I think about it from Paul's perspective is it's almost like coming home and you find out that your child has, in order to please you, they have drawn a huge art project over the living room wall, right?

And they think they're doing something beautiful and they think that they're adding to the beauty of the house and the parent obviously thinks something different, right? But for Paul, it's that but it's actually way more dangerous because he knows that this is actually going to lead these people far astray and why does Paul tell these people they need to give up their religion, to give up all these things that we just listed?

Why does he say that? There's two reasons that we need to hear this morning. One is because it doesn't work. If you look down there at the end of verse 23, Paul, he lists all these things, these practices these people have and he says in verse 23, these have an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion but then at the very end he says, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

That's really interesting because these people are trying so hard to be religious, they're trying so hard to follow God in these particular ways, to do their asceticism, to do their worship of angels, they want to be religious and Paul says it doesn't do a thing and I think one reason that Paul gives us why it doesn't do a thing is if you look in verse 18, when he's talking about the visions, he says something really interesting.

He says, these people who have these visions are puffed up, in other words, they're proud, without reason by their sensuous mind. So one of the dangers that Paul is talking about here is these people look like they're becoming more religious and it actually kind of looks beautiful to the outside of these people but really what they're doing is they're trading one sin for another.

[ 11 : 21 ] Maybe they know that they have some kind of a sin they're dealing with, maybe they're dealing with lust, who knows what kind of a sin they're trying to kill in themselves and so they create these religious practices to try to handle those sins but Paul's saying you know what happens really?

Maybe you get rid of those original sins but you trade it for a far worse sin which is the sin of pride. The one sin that truly says I need no God. I can do it myself.

And just to be clear when I say Paul's telling these people to give up their religion he's not telling them to give up religion he's telling them to give up their religion to give up these things that they've made up in order to please God.

The things that they've made up in order to get closer to God. And you know it's just as a side note it's worth thinking here you know when we think about who we want to be as a church and we talk about this in the new members class today one of the things that we want to be as a church is a biblical church and you might say well obviously you want to be a biblical church but what we mean is we want we sincerely want everything that we do in our service and as a community to reflect what God has told us to do so God tells us to pray and to sing and to he even tells us to fast and we want to do those things to read the word to submit ourselves to the word but if we're doing something that the Bible doesn't tell us to do it's good for us to stop and ask well why are we doing this because if it's so important wouldn't God have told us to do it we want to be a biblical church like that and you know that also means that we want to emphasize what the Bible emphasizes the most because sometimes the church will be doing something that's just fine but when we insist on it like it's the most important thing like maybe the style of worship that we choose or there's all kinds of things people can disagree on we've got to say are we standing on biblical grounds when we make this choice or are we not the way that Jesus worded this to the Pharisees was one of his condemnations was you're doing things that are biblical but you've got the order totally wrong and you're ignoring the most important thing so in Matthew 23 he says woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you tithe mint and dill and cumin and you've neglected the weightier matters of the law justice and mercy and faithfulness and Paul's saying the Colossians have to give up part of their religion things that they think are so important because they're not biblical and they fill them with pride they're puffed up like he says but there's a deeper reason here why Paul says that these people have to give up these practices and it's this they're looking somewhere else for something that only Jesus can provide that's really the theme of this passage and what's interesting is you've got this whole

Paul's here complaining about what the people are doing wrong but if you notice what he spends more time talking about than anything else is Jesus he's saying you're doing this wrong but think about Jesus and what he's saying is you're looking to this practice to accomplish something and you're missing you're missing how Jesus fits into this you're underestimating the power of Jesus for all these things that you're doing the Colossians are going somewhere else for something that only Jesus can provide and you know Tim Keller said this before he said the dividing line really within humanity is not between religious people and non-religious people it's between people who are religious and Christians because if you're a Christian what it means is you're not trusting in what you do anymore you're trusting only in Jesus and what he's done for you and we'll see that in just a moment but so Paul's saying you've got to give up these things but then on the same token you've got to see who the real Jesus is and see how he actually fulfills what you're looking for and it starts in verse 9 he goes piece by piece showing who Jesus is to these people and in verse 9 you see he says for in him in Christ the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily and then he says and you have been filled in him who is the head of all rule and all authority now this is a really simple argument he's making if you think about it he's saying think about Jesus he is fully God you know as much

[ 16 : 03 ] God as he could be he's that and and he is in you so what do you do with that well I mean what why are you praying to angels why why are you why are you doing all these extra religious things that I never told you to do are you seeking power are you seeking to get close to God God is in you we looked last week at about we talked about abiding in Christ and Paul's saying listen you what you have to realize is that everything you're looking for is already true of you because you're connected to Jesus Christ in whom the fullness of God dwells and he uses different kinds of arguments here he talks about circumcision and maybe he talks about circumcision because there were some Jews who were saying well if you really want to be a Christian you've got to be circumcised because we know that that happened in the Galatian church right and Paul's saying listen circumcision is all about the outside of your body and what I'm telling you is that Jesus is what he has done for you is getting to the heart of what you needed circumcision for circumcision is an outward symbol of your relationship with God

Jesus Christ is circumcising your heart he is changing you from the depths of who you are and then in verse 13 he says and you were dead in your trespasses and God made you alive with him and then in verse 14 this beautiful illustration he says well it's not an illustration it's true but you'll see here in a second he says he's forgiven our trespasses by canceling the record of death that stood against us with its legal demands and he set that record aside nailing it to the cross and then I love this part he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him now I love that because you know in the ancient world when people would have first heard about Jesus they would have heard about a man who died on a cross a very tragic death a very humiliating death but the way that Paul describes the cross is totally the opposite he describes it as a victory parade where Jesus goes to the cross to meet with his enemies and to disarm them and that word disarm it's a good translation but what it literally means is he unclothed them because you know what are you doing when you defeat your enemies you're taking their armor off but it's this picture of Jesus going to the cross and at the cross if you had been there it would have looked like

Jesus was the one who was being unclothed because he was unclothed he was humiliated before the whole world and yet Paul is saying what was really going on was the complete opposite he was disarming his enemies he was putting his enemies to shame at the cross by defeating death and sin and all evil powers in this world that's the real Jesus and if you think about it this idea of angel worship is so strange but there's what most scholars think and I think this is where this passage really speaks to us this morning most scholars think that the reason people worship angels was because if you live in the ancient world you're living in a world where everyone believes that there are many gods so if you were living in Colossae the average person believed that the world was governed by all kinds of gods and some of them were good most of them were neutral you know you can make them angry you can make them happy depending on what you did and the kind of world that that created was what you might call a world anxiety so one scholar put it like this he said the ancient world was scary and dangerous for the

Greeks in the first century it seemed that the whole universe in all its vastness and intricacy was beyond human comprehension or control being governed by a host of wrathful gods and indifferent supreme powers human beings could do little more than struggle against the relentless tide of fate now listen you're a farmer in the first century and you're worried about when's the rain going to come again or you're worried about when are the people going to come over the wall and attack us you've got a lot of fears you're living in a world of anxiety and so the average person said to themselves well I can't control the world around me and so what I've got to do is I have to get the gods on my side and that's why you would pray to angels because you would say I need an angel I need an angel so bad who can help me and keep my family safe and Paul's saying yes the world is dangerous yes the world is scary yes you have enemies out there but know who you have in Jesus because if

Jesus is yours if you're really in him then what is true of you your enemies have already been defeated at the cross everything that you have in this world to be truly afraid of God has he's disarmed he's taken their clothes off they can't do anything to you not in the final sense and you know we look at these people these pre-modern people and we say they're so primitive they think there's gods they think there's all these little gods that you can appease or not appease and we say it's not true we say there's only one true God or in our modern world some people say there's no God but we have the same struggles because what do we do we have anxieties just like the people in the first century did about where is our food going to come from how am I going to handle this relationship my world is falling apart I feel so out of control and we don't have supernatural gods our gods are the things that we run to to feel secure when we don't feel any control and you know a helpful way to think about this for yourself is when are you most anxious in a given week when does your heart rate start bumping up that may show you what your idol is it may show you that the thing that's causing your stress is your idol or your idol could be the thing that you use to alleviate that stress

[ 22 : 23 ] I mean when things are bad what do you reach for is it alcohol is it just to turn on the television you just mute things when you get stressed you just turn on the TV and ignore life we have our ways of coping with the same anxieties that the first century had with coping right what is it and what what Paul is saying is you'll never know the real Jesus until you see the Jesus who meets you at the depth of your anxiety and who speaks to you to calm it that's who Jesus is he's the one because he's a victor he's the one who goes to a cross and defeats our enemies so you don't need to go worship angels because he has all that power that you think the angels have and one of the challenges here honestly let's let's be honest one of the challenges here when a pastor stands up here and says Jesus is all that you need is because it kind of sounds like the same answer that the kid gives in Sunday school when no one knows the answer because no one knows the answer he just says is it

Jesus right sometimes we just we say that Jesus is the answer but we actually don't know how he's the answer I don't know how he deals with my anxiety right that's why theology is important because the Bible makes us slow down and say how does Jesus speak to this problem that I'm having today how does what does it mean that I'm struggling in this relationship with someone or with a friend something's falling apart what does it mean for Jesus to speak to me in that problem for him to be who I need him to be in this or when I'm dealing with a sin that I feel like I could never overcome myself what does it mean to rely on him in that part of my life and that's what Paul is saying listen you know the ancients they went to the angels they went to all these various lengths to deal with their problems and we do too and Paul's saying can you go to Jesus first can you see what he has to offer before you run to other places and you know one way to think about the message this morning is this the measure of our religion

Paul calls us to be religious to be very religious but the right kind of religion the measure of our religion is is it bringing us closer to Jesus you know is it is our religion something that we try to go around Jesus with and we say we love Jesus but we know that we also want to do this thing Paul's saying in everything you do let it be to bring you closer to Christ or let it be done in Christ so when you pray you pray in the name of Jesus you're depending on him or when you take the Lord's supper you're being reminded that you depend on Jesus or when you listen to the word you're being reminded that you need Jesus that he's the one speaking to us or when you sing songs you're praising him and you're being reminded that you need Jesus in all these things and even when you pursue holiness the Bible says pursue holiness become become the kind of religious that God wants you to be when you do that though do it in total dependence on Jesus let me just close with one challenge one takeaway for this morning all of us are going to face difficulties this week we face difficulties last week we're going to face things that stress us out we're going to face moments where we look up and we say I can't believe I just did that or I can't believe I just said that there was an advertisement campaign when we were living in

Scotland these banners were all over the city and the banners said try praying and it was speaking to non-Christians it was an evangelical thing that basically said if you're really stressed out in the last effort try praying see if that doesn't help you but what it means to be a Christian is to begin moving praying closer and closer to the front of who we are where when we're anxious the first thing we do is pray the first of everything is realizing we need Jesus when you wake up in the morning saying I can't do this day without you Lord I need your spirit in me to be who you called me to be so here's the resolution in every challenge that you face this week make Christ your first port of call and that's a promise Jesus promises that when you do that he will be there he will meet you in your need so I'll just stop there let's pray heavenly father we thank you that you've given us Jesus that in him the fullness of deity dwelt and you've given him to us help us to see what we have in

Christ in your son's name we pray amen our closing hymn this morning is hymn number 598 guide me oh thou great jehovah we'll sing verses 1 to 3 let's stand guide me oh thou great jehovah pilgrim through this barren land i am weak but thou art mighty hold me with thy powerful hand bread of heaven bread of heaven feed me till i want no more feed me till i want no more open now the crystal fountain whence the healing stream doth flow let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through song deliver strong deliver be thou still my strength and shield be thou still my strength and shield when i tread the verge of jordan bid my anxious fear subside death of death and hell's destruction land me safe on canaan's side songs of phrases songs of phrases i will ever give to thee i will ever give to thee may the lord bless you and keep you may the lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you may the lord lift his countenance upon you and give you peace amen to