

AM Colossians 2:8-15 Christ Alone

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Date: 23 March 2025

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[0 : 00] Bible now, and we've got two readings. First is from John 15. I'm not sure how it got reduced on the notice sheet to just verse 5.

! I sent in the details so I've only got myself to blame. It should read verses 1 to 7. John 15. For apart from me you can do nothing.

If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers, and the branches are gathered and thrown into the fire and burn.

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. Now we turn over to Paul's letter to the Colossians, and this will be the subject that we'll be studying later.

[2 : 10] Colossians chapter 2, verses 8 to 15, page 1184 of the Church Bibles. Colossians 2, verse 8.

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 the whole fullness of the Holy Spirit dwells bodily.

In the holy spirit of the Holy Spirit dwells bodily.

By cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

[4 : 03] He disarmed the rulers and authorities, and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

Let's bow together in prayer. Well, let me ask you to turn please to Colossians chapter 2.

Continuing our studies in Colossians, going to look at verses 8 to 15.

But I'll read again verses 9 and 10. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

And you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

During the Reformation, great men such as Luther and Calvin gave a great deal of thought to the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

[5 : 23] And that teaching is sometimes summed up in five short phrases. Scripture alone.

Christ alone. Grace alone. Faith alone. The glory of God alone.

They're sometimes called the five solas. From the Latin word sola, meaning alone. You may have seen from the notice sheet that my sermon titles today are two of those five solas.

Christ alone. Christ alone this morning. Faith alone this evening. It's not that I'm planning to do a series of studies on the five solas.

It's just that the passages we've come to in our studies in Colossians and Acts happen to illustrate these vital doctrines.

[6 : 43] This morning it's Christ alone. Christ alone is our saviour. Christ alone is our king.

And in Christ alone we have everything that we need for the Christian life. There's therefore no need to look anywhere else.

Indeed there is nothing to be found spiritually outside of Christ. Christ.

In Castle Douglas there is a cafe with an advertising board outside. It has two arrows on it. One pointing into the cafe.

One pointing out. The one pointing in says cake. This way. Follow the arrow. The other pointing out says, no cake.

[7 : 47] Well, you could say something similar of Christ. In Christ, everything. Outside of Christ, nothing.

I want us to look at this passage today under two headings. The emptiness of the world without Christ, in verse 8.

No cake, if you like. And the fullness of Christ. Communed with the Christian, in verses 9 to 15.

Cake in abundance, if you like. And that second heading, I'll divide into three sub-headings.

The deity of Christ, in verse 9. The blessings that we have in Christ, verses 10 to 14. And the triumph of Christ, in verse 15.

[8 : 58] And if it sounds as if it's all about Christ, you're absolutely right. It is. The whole of Colossians is all about Christ.

First, though, let me remind you of the background. Paul is writing this letter from prison in Rome, about AD 60.

And he's received news of the church at Colossae. And he's very encouraged. Things are going on well. But there is cause for concern.

False doctrine is spreading through all the churches. And Paul wants to protect these Colossians from it. It seems likely that in Colossae, some were teaching that Christ was not enough.

Yes, you have to believe in Christ. They would admit that. But they were saying, you've also got to be circumcised and keep the Jewish law. Possibly this was mixed in with pagan philosophy.

[10 : 17] The end of the chapter here, there are strange ideas about asceticism and angels. It's been summed up as a Christ plus gospel.

Christ plus all these other things as well. Paul's answer is that it is Christ plus nothing.

Christ is sufficient for all our needs. So let's look at what he says. Firstly, the emptiness of the world without Christ.

In verse 8, see to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy or empty deceit according to human tradition. According to the elemental spirits of the world.

And not according to Christ. The word that Paul uses here, translated, take you captive.

[11 : 25] Calvin likens it to thieves coming and breaking into the sheepfold and taking away the sheep.

These people had come into the sheep. These people had come into the churches and they had led people astray. They'd stolen them from the churches.

Taken them off perhaps into their own congregations. With plausible but false ideas. With wild goods.

To use the illustration I had with the children. What they offer is worthless. Paul calls it an empty deceit.

We're reminded here perhaps of Ecclesiastes. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. All is vanity.

The word vanity means emptiness.

[12 : 28] Now Paul is not condemning all philosophy here. There have been great philosophers like Plato who have had some quite useful ideas.

He's condemning philosophy that is not according to Christ. To follow through what I said with the children. Check it up in the Bible.

If it's not according to the Bible. It is false. Likewise he's not condemning all tradition. In 1 Corinthians 11.

Paul actually praises them for keeping the traditions that he had delivered to them. About the Lord's Supper and other things. The objection is again to traditions that are not according to Christ.

These worldly ideas are empty. They contribute nothing to our spiritual life. And they destroy what we have.

[13 : 39] Today Paul perhaps would have condemned the cults. Like the Jehovah's Witnesses.

There's an instance of people creeping into the churches. Trying to sell you a Christ plus doctrine. Christ plus good works.

Christ plus good works. And it's all empty. It won't help you. It will destroy you. Or perhaps he'd condemn the religions that have spread through the world.

And into our own country as well. False religions. Which are leading people astray. Or perhaps he'd condemn the worldly philosophy that has overtaken some churches.

Don't be led astray, Paul says. Hold fast to Christ. Which brings us to our second heading.

[14 : 44] The fullness of the Christian in Christ. And Paul sets before us here the glory of Christ. And the glory of what we have in him.

And the implication is clear. Why would you want anything else? Why bother with the philosophy of the world if you have Christ? Firstly reminds us of the deity of Christ in verse 9.

For in him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily. He's already introduced this magnificent thought in verse 19 of chapter 1.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. What an incredible thought. All the glory of God is seen in Christ.

All the power of God. All the love of God. All the goodness of God. All the holiness of God. If you want to see God, look no further.

[15:57] Look at him. In Christ you will see God. Paul didn't invent that idea. It goes back to the Old Testament.

Famous prophecy in Isaiah 9. For unto us a child is born and so on. One of the titles given to the Messiah there is the mighty God.

Christ is God. Christ is God. Jesus himself has said plainly in John 14 and verse 9. He who has seen me has seen the Father.

John sums it up in chapter 1 and verse 14 of his gospel. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father. Full of grace and truth. When he says here that the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily in him.

[17:05] It seems to me most likely that he is referring to the incarnation. And to the fact that he rose bodily from the dead. Though some of the commentators see it as simply meaning entirely.

Either would be true. Jesus is God. And everything we need is to be found in him.

Which leads us on to the blessings that we have in Christ. Paul puts it first in general terms. In verse 10. You have been filled in him.

Who is the head of all rule and authority. The authorised version translates it. You are complete in him.

To take the word as it is in the ESV. You have been filled in him. You know if you've drunk a whole lot of water. If I were to drink all of this glass of water straight away.

[18:10] And someone offered me another glass. I'd say I don't need any more. I'm full. If you've drunk from the pleasures of heaven. In our Lord Jesus Christ.

What more do you need? You are filled with him. It's a similar thought again in John's gospel. Chapter 1 verse 16.

From his fullness. We have all received. And grace for grace. Our visiting preacher last week.

Dr. Neil MacDonald. Spoke on this as well. Speaking of Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3. You may remember the climax of that prayer. Is that they might be filled with all the fullness of God.

He posed a question. What do you give to the man who has everything? Or quite. If we have Christ. What more can be added? Now the key to this fullness.

[19:14] Is our union. With Christ. It's no use. All fullness. Residing in Christ. Up in heaven. If we on earth.

Are separated from him. The whole point is that we have to be united with him. To receive that fullness. That's why I read from John 15.

I am the vine. You are the branches. So long as the branches are joined to the vine. Life comes flowing through Christ.

If they're cut off. Then the branches wither and die. As Jesus says. Without me. You can do nothing. But if we're joined to Christ.

There is an everlasting flow. Of life. You can see that principle. Illustrated right at the moment.

[20:13] All over the countryside. Spring has begun. You can see the blossom coming out on the trees. But where there are branches.

That have been broken off. In the recent storms. There's nothing. No blossom on them. Separated from the tree. There's no life in them anymore.

Only the branches. That are joined to the tree. Will have blossom. Likewise with us. If we're joined to Christ. Then all the fullness of God is ours.

And blessing after blessing. Will come flowing down to us. And Paul goes on to list some of those blessings.

He begins with spiritual circumcision. In verse 11. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands.

[21 : 12] By putting off the body of the flesh. By the circumcision of Christ. Now this may not be the obvious place to start.

If I asked you. List the blessings you have in Christ. I don't imagine any of you would immediately say. I've been circumcised in Christ. Doesn't cross our minds.

But Paul is dealing with the actual problem here in Colossae. These false teachers. Who said. It's not enough to believe you have to be circumcised.

That's not a problem today. But it was a huge problem. In the early church. The council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. Was held to consider this.

And that council had actually said plainly. No you do not have to be circumcised. But still this false teaching persisted.

[22 : 14] And so Paul is dealing with it here. It was a serious matter. Because it wasn't just a matter of ritual. They were effectively saying.

You have to become Jews. You have to keep the law of Moses. That's what circumcision was all about. It was a sign that you belonged to the people of God.

And a pledge to keep the law of God. What Paul is saying here. Is that you don't need to be circumcised.

Because you now have the reality. Circumcision was a symbol of a godly people. You are now a godly people in Christ.

You have been circumcised in the heart. And therefore you don't need to be circumcised in the flesh as well. The Old Testament prophets had challenged Israel.

[23 : 18] Circumcised your hearts. In other words put away sin from your lives. And live godly lives. Well Paul is saying. You have that heart circumcision.

In Christ. When he says that we have it by the circumcision of Christ. He doesn't of course mean by virtue of the literal circumcision of Christ as a baby.

But by the spiritual circumcision that you have from Christ. And he goes on to explain that in terms that perhaps are a little more familiar and easier for us today.

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.

This is the same thought that we find in Romans 6. Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death.

[24 : 27] We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death. In order that just as Christ was raised from the dead. By the glory of the Father.

We might walk in newness of life. United with Christ. Our experience has become his. And his experience has become ours.

And we have therefore spiritually died with him. And risen again. Our old life is gone.

Dead and buried. And we have risen again to a new life. A new life of righteousness. The old has passed away.

Behold the new has come. And baptism is the symbol of that. You could say that baptism is the new covenant counterpart to circumcision.

[25 : 33] Now as most of you know. There are differences of opinion about baptism. I don't like to raise that subject.

Because most of you know that I'm a retired Baptist minister. And this is not a Baptist church. It's not my purpose whatever. To cause division or doubt.

But here it is. And we can't altogether avoid it. Let me merely explain the two positions very briefly. Our own church along with many others.

Holds that baptism is to be administered like circumcision to believers and their children. This was the view of the reformers.

They emphasized the continuity between the covenants. Baptists in contrast hold that baptism is only for believers.

[26 : 41] There is a difference they say between the covenants. Circumcision is for those who are born as Israelites. Baptism for those who are born again. They point out that at the council of Jerusalem baptism wasn't mentioned.

If baptism had simply replaced circumcision then that would have been an easy way out of the whole problem. Either way.

Faith is necessary for it to become a reality. Either now in the case of believers. Or in the future in the case of babies.

Paul says notice that we are raised by faith in the powerful working of God. Likewise there are differences over the mode of baptism.

Our own church along with many others practices sprinkling. Isaiah 52 is sometimes quoted. He shall sprinkle many nations.

[27 : 51] And this again was the view of the reformers. It has history on its side. Baptists maintain that it should be by immersion.

Pointing out that Jesus went down into the water to be baptized. And that immersion more vividly represents burial and resurrection. But either way.

The important thing is not the ritual. But the reality. That's why Baptists and Presbyterians can have perfectly good fellowship with each other.

Because actually. In the things that really matter. We're joined together. The reality is. That in Christ.

We have. A whole new life. And behind that. Lies another blessing. Equally important.

[28 : 57] And likewise ours in Christ alone. Forgiveness. 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. New life without forgiveness. Would be pointless. We'd be lost anyway. Because of our past sins.

And forgiveness without new life. Would be pointless. Because we'd just go on in sin. The two go together. But how are we forgiven? Paul explains it very vividly in verse 14.

By cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside nailing it to the cross.

The image here is of an old fashioned bookkeeper. Keeping records of each person's debt. So here is a slip of paper.

[29 : 58] It has your name on it. And it says that you owe a hundred pounds. It's there in black and white. And it is nailed to the wall.

So no one can remove it. You owe that money. Nowadays of course it would all be done on a computer. There would just be an electronic record.

But it would be just as real. And just as inescapable. You owe a hundred pounds. The closest I have seen to that in modern life is the system that you see sometimes in a restaurant.

I don't know if you've ever been into a restaurant and they write out what you've ordered on a bit of paper. And they pin it to a board behind the cashier's desk.

And it says table six had four steaks. They owe a hundred pounds. Expensive restaurant. But what if table seven said we'll pay their bill.

[31 : 10] Then they would take down that bit of paper off the board. And they would pin it on table seven. And when we now look at table six. Table six owes nothing.

You're free. You don't owe a penny. Table seven will pay your debt for you. Something like that has happened to our sins.

The law said the soul that sins it shall die. And thousands of sins were pinned up against your name. God may not immediately require payment for them all.

But he will eventually. That terrible debt is inescapable. Unless someone comes and says he will pay your debt for you.

That is what Christ has done. All of our sins. Thousands of them. Have been removed from our account. And debited to him.

[32 : 18] And he paid for them all. On the cross. There was an inscription nailed to the cross. Said simply this is Jesus the king of the Jews.

But unknown to Pilate something even greater was going on. Even more magnificent. Jesus hanging on the cross.

Was bearing our sins. Those hammer blows that nailed Jesus to the cross. They nailed our sins to the cross with him.

And there those sins died. Our debt was paid. To the full. In Christ therefore our sins are forgiven. How wonderful. Ransomed. Healed. Restored. Forgiven. Who like thee. His praise should sing.

Paul concludes however.

[33 : 23] Not with us. But with Christ. Verse 15. He concludes the thought begun in verse 10. Said in verse 10. Christ is the head of all rule and authority. Now in verse 15.

He adds. He disarmed. The rulers and authorities. And put them to open shame. Triumphant over them. In him. In verse 10.

It concerns all authority. Good and evil. Verse 15. Seems to focus on the powers of darkness. Especially the devil. The devil thought he destroyed Christ.

When he died on the cross. He thought he destroyed us. By our sins. But instead he has failed on both accounts.

Christ has risen. Triumphant over death. And we have been forgiven. And raised to newness of life. Christ then emerges victorious over all.

[34 : 24] Our Lord and Saviour. Our Shepherd and King. Everything you need. Is yours. In him. Why look anywhere else?

So let me ask you as we conclude. Are you trusting. In Christ alone? There are many in the world. Who are not trusting in Christ at all. They see no need for him. They are quite content with life. Quite unconcerned about their sin. If God exists.

Then they are quite sure. He will forgive them. Because he is a God of love. Or else they assume that their good works. Will outweigh the bad. They will be.

Put to shame. On the day of judgment. There are many who are relying. Upon some outward form of religion.

[35 : 22] They go to church. They have been baptized maybe. But from one Sunday to the next. God is not in all their thoughts.

Therefore even if they are truly Christians. They are living spiritually famished lives. Many are relying on themselves. They are proud of all they have achieved in life.

Confident they can cope with anything that happens. You know self confidence is fine. Until it isn't. Until one day some problem arises.

That is too big for you. Then you will realize. That you need Christ. In fact you always have needed him. If only you had known.

If you have not trusted in Christ. Do so now. He is ready.

[36 : 23] And he is willing to accept you. But even amongst Christians. The question remains. Are you trusting in Christ. Alone. A little bit of self reliance.

So easily creeps into our lives. Or a little bit of confusion. Because of the empty deceit of the world. This is what Paul was afraid of with these Colossians.

They are Christians. They are going on well. But they could so easily be deceived. By false teaching. Any kind of Christ plus teaching.

Is an insult to God. It implies that Christ is not enough. And since Christ is God. It implies that God is not enough.

Or perhaps it is just that a little bit of complacency. Is set in. We have settled. For what we have. Rather than enjoying. All the riches that are ours in Christ.

[37 : 26] Christ. Neil MacDonald. Last Sunday evening. Urged us to. Pray that we might. Enter into. All these blessings.

Old preachers used to talk about. Possessing your possessions. They also talked about. Having a checkbook. On the bank of heaven. All those riches of Christ.

Available to you. The whole fullness. Of the deity. Dwells bodily. In Christ. And all that fullness. Is yours.

In him. May the Lord help us. To trust. In Christ alone. Amen.