

Freedom in Christ

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[0 : 00] Readings from Colossians chapter 2 verses 8 to 23 on page 1184. 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 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 cancelling 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.

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 of belongs to Christ.

[1 : 36] 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 the 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 are 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 the flesh.

Now, have you heard the phrase, remember who you are? Perhaps it's from your parents, just as we're about to sort of head out for an evening of fun with our friends, or perhaps even from our football coach in the locker room, pep talk, reminding us that we represent our school and all the values it represents.

Remember who you are. Or perhaps, like me, you've heard it from popular culture references, such as Disney's Lion King, where that phrase, remember who you are, formed the major turning point in the film.

[3 : 04] For years, the young lions, Simba, lived a hakuna matata, a carefree way of life, in trying to bury his guilt and shame. But as his homeland is destroyed, a vision of Simba's dad, Mufasa, pleaded for him to go back to his homeland and to take up his position as the rightful king.

Mufasa says, Simba, you have forgotten me. You have forgotten who you are, and so have forgotten me. Remember who you are.

You are my son, the one true king. Remember. And in the letter to the Colossians, the Colossian church was under attack from many forms of false teaching, all claiming that Jesus wasn't enough, that they needed something else.

And in the confused age we live in today, when those around us marginalize or ridicule us for following Jesus, how do we know following Jesus is worth it?

How can we have confidence that Jesus is all we need? How do we keep on going and growing in the Christian walk? Now these same questions threaten the faith of the Christians at Colossae.

[4 : 24] And as we started to see a few weeks ago, just before our passage today, in verse 4 of chapter 2, look down with me if you like, Paul's purpose of the section of this letter is so that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.

So from verse 8 to 23, Paul warns us about these plausible arguments, which on the surface look so attractive. But he doesn't just warn them.

He also provides the antidote. Under attack from false teaching, they need to remember who Jesus is and remember who they are in him.

The problem faced at Colossae was they were false teachers who taught that Christ's death and resurrection on the cross wasn't enough, that they were missing something in their Christian walk, that they needed to do or to have something else to really deal with their sins.

In essence, they were denying the sufficiency of what Christ has done on the cross. Now perhaps at the heart of the Colossian church, Christ was indeed central.

[5 : 33] And that's something Paul was very thankful for, as is evident in the beginning of the letter. But there seems to be schools of corrosive ideas which threaten the very heart of the Colossian Christians.

So what are these dangers? Well, the danger is the threat of false teaching. So I hope you'll see that at my first point, that false teaching is worthless. False teaching is worthless.

Now I put these warnings roughly into sort of three beware's, but it isn't hard and fast and some of them may well overlap. But firstly, beware of human wisdom. Beware of human wisdom.

Look down with me at 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.

The word captive is a rare Greek verb which refers to carrying off the spoils of war. It's a picture of a person who was once free, but now taken prisoner, no longer free.

[6 : 40] And it may be that Paul was warning the Colossians about Gnostic teaching. The Gnostics believe that salvation is obtained through knowledge. But his warning was probably, I think, far broader than simply stopping at Gnosticism.

I think that it includes any way or form of living, any human tradition, or any form of spirituality that is derived by things that is other than Jesus Christ.

The world is not short of philosophies or religions or any number of human priorities and agendas. But if any of them does not put Jesus at the center, it's nothing but empty deceit, worthless.

Now jump with me to the very next page, to verse 23 at the very end of the chapter. These things, that is man-made rules and teachings, 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 the flesh. In other words, any teaching outside of Jesus, however attractive, is powerless in dealing with the problem of sin.

[7 : 54] Today, many churches have become strong campaigners of social justice. And there are many things commendable about that. Yet if only morality was taught, it leads people down the garden path of working for their salvation rather than resting on the freedom that can already be found in Christ.

And many churches fly the flag of tolerance and equality. Again, many good things can be said about it. But if tolerance and equality was a central agenda on the pulpit instead of Jesus, it opens the door to things like gender dysphoria, moral relativism, over-emphasis of individual rights, tolerance to even other religions where all roads lead to God, and so on.

In other words, it takes a high view of man but a low view of Jesus. Now sadly, these places are where the word of God becomes no more than a paperweight.

It remains unread and it leads everyone to have a view of what God is like in their own minds. Confusion rather than clarity of the God we can find in the Bible.

So don't be deceived by human wisdom. Secondly, beware of doing religion. Now look with me at verse 16. 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.

[9 : 26] These things are a shadow of the things to come but the substance belongs to Christ. Now some in the Colossian church have been telling their mates that if they eat or don't eat certain foods or drinks or unless they observe certain religious rituals they can't be a real Christian.

But that is to drag them back into the dangers of religious idolatry. Instead of resting on the freedom Christ has already bought is to reduce worship to a list of do's and don'ts.

Even if the Old Testament made it necessary to adhere to the law for a season it was only a shadow of what was to come a silhouette of the real thing. Now today for us of course coming to church and attending growth group and prayer gathering are great things to be doing.

Please come. But these things by themselves won't save us. The same thing goes for baptism taking communion or even reading the Bible. If we simply treat these things as tick boxing then we risk imprisoning ourselves in religion missing out on the true joy of looking to Jesus.

Don't do religion. Now thirdly beware of spiritual gimmicks. Now another type of false teaching tries to add what Christ has already done by introducing ways to heighten a sense of spirituality.

[10:53] Look with me at Paul's warning in verse 18. Let no one disqualify you insisting on asceticism and worship of angels going on in detail about visions puffed up without reason by their sensuous mind and not holding fast to the head that is Christ Jesus.

Now asceticism is a belief where only the spiritual world is good but the material world is bad under the control of evil. ascetics believe that the only way to keep their body in check was to be severe to their own body and to abstain from all forms of worldly desires sometimes not eating for days or weeks on end.

It's a way of suppressing the material world and making themselves feel more spiritual feel more humble. Then there were others in Colossae who thought it would be far too presumptuous to approach God directly.

Rather a way to show more humility was by approaching God through angels worshipping them first because they were a bit lower than God.

And yet others claim that the scriptures and the message that was passed down by the apostles to Epaphras and then to them was not enough. They insisted that the receiving of special dreams or visions was necessary to be a true Christian.

[12:21] But what does Paul say? These people are puffed up, proudly telling everyone about visions they've been having, as if somehow they were more spiritual because of these experiences they've had.

Now today the geographic landscape across Britain and Europe are peppered with beautiful churches, but these buildings are no more or less spiritual than the school hall we're in.

Similarly, Easter or Christmas service, which we're having in a couple of months, it's no more or less spiritual than an ordinary Sunday service like today.

And when we hear of an experience like a dramatic conversion or a miraculous healing or speaking in tongues or the so-called baptism of the Holy Spirit, we ought to be discerning and go back to the Bible and see how Jesus defines a true believer.

God simply to deny oneself, take up one's cross and follow him. Therefore, what we must be careful of if we're a Christian is that all these spiritual add-ons, human wisdom, doing religion, spiritual gimmicks, they all deny the sufficiency and the freedom we already have in Christ Jesus.

[13:42] Paul says, no, don't let these false teachings cause us to doubt our faith as if somehow we're inferior or inadequate. No, they are of no value.

Now, notice Paul's striking diagnosis of the spiritual conditions of these false teachers in verse 19. Look down with me. These people are not holding fast to the head.

The NIV renders it this way. They have lost connection with the head. And we don't need to be a medical doctor, do we? To know that a detachment of the head from the body is not a good thing.

The warning here is clear. Not holding fast to the head is fatal. And I take a Paul's list here as an exhaustive, but the principle is that if our Christian lives don't affirm verses 6 to 7, which we saw last week, here it is, as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

If we don't affirm this, then we risk becoming detached from the head. In contrast to the fullness that Jesus offers, by trying to add to what Christ has already done for us, false teaching actually takes away from the fullness that we might otherwise enjoy in him.

[15:11] And friends, if we're sitting here today as Christians, then this ought to be wonderfully liberating for us, because we can live our Christian lives fully confident that we've already been filled with everything we ever need to live a full Christian life.

But if we wouldn't yet call ourselves a Christian, why not consider the full life that we can enjoy should we trust our life to him? In Christ, life to the full, false teaching worthless.

So if Paul's warning about false teaching is clear, Paul's antidote to false teaching is for Christians to remember Christ's triumph. Remember Christ's triumph, which is my second hitting.

Now back in The Lion King, Asimba's life is transformed as he is reminded of who he is by remembering that he is the son of the great king Mufasa. And so it is with Christians in a much bigger way.

We live transformed lives as we are reminded of who we are by remembering who King Jesus is. And near the beginning of our passage in verse 9, verse 9, Paul states, in Christ, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

[16:33] Jesus is the full Godhead in the flesh. We've seen this over the past few weeks, haven't we? But the letters of the Colossian church is designed to be read out in one go.

So the whole picture of Christ's complete supremacy would still be fresh in the minds of the hearers by the time they got here. But because we're looking at Colossians over a number of weeks, I thought it might be helpful if we recapped a glimpse of this from chapter 1.

So just go back one page and let's look at chapter 1 verse 10. He is Lord, he is the Lord. Verse 13, he's the ruler of God's eternal kingdom.

Verse 14, through him Christians have redemption and their sins forgiven. Verse 15, he is the very image of the God we can't see. And then verse 16, he was in the beginning.

He's the creator, the sustainer of all things. And everything was created through him and for him. I could go on, but in other words, God's very character, his attributes, his glory, are fully revealed in human form in the person of Jesus.

[17:45] Everything God is, Jesus is. And yet, even more astonishingly, and I think this is the key to understanding who we are in Christ, is that back in chapter 2 now, so just flip over back on the page, or forward the page.

Paul puts verse 9 and 10 together. Look at verse 9. 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.

Now, friends, to receive Christ is to be filled. This means, as we've seen in the past weeks, in Christ, we can know the full revelation of God. Everything we can know or experience of God is found in Jesus.

And we can know full reconciliation with God, complete forgiveness from sins and a perfect restored relationship with God. Now, notice this filling is expressed in past tense, filled, and made full, made complete.

that means if we're a Christian, all the gifts of fullness, the sight of heaven, is already completely ours. Now, maybe that we're here today and already know this fullness, then rejoice and praise him and continue to enjoy being complete in him.

[19:11] But for some of us, it may be that we've been struggling a bit in our Christian walk. Perhaps we've been drowning in school or work or just spinning too many plates in life.

Or we might even be having doubts about the Christian faith, wondering if indeed other belief systems might have something to offer. Then we need to remember who we are in Jesus, that in him we know the full revelation of God, and in him we are fully redeemed, fully forgiven, fully free. Remember who Jesus is. Remember who we are in him. And as we rejoice, let us also remember the very heavy price that Jesus paid for us on the cross.

So look down with me at verse 11. 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 raised 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 once dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh God made alive together with him having forgiven all our trespasses by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands this he set aside nailing it to the cross now the language here might be slightly strange to our ears but the point is this that through Christ's death and resurrection believers have been set apart for God our hearts have been circumcised we who were once headed for destruction because of our debts paid in full paid in full by Jesus on the cross and that is why the victory rightly belongs to him look with me at verse 15 he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him now the picture is of a

[21 : 27] Roman triumphal procession a lavish welcome home celebration for the victory of the Roman army over an enemy state it's a huge spectacle for the whole city musicians sounding in fanfare the victorious army proudly marching along the main avenue of the city the uniforms shiny the uniforms tidy sorry armors polished weapons shiny gloriously triumphant now in contrast the captives are paraded in chains faces gaunt and still bearing the blood and scars and the humiliation of war they were put to open shame and as Jesus hung on the cross it looked like defeat and humiliation yet what was achieved on the cross and his resurrection three days later was anything but a defeat the cross was where

Jesus the only person ever to perfectly follow God's commands went willingly to be crucified the cross was where the punishment of our sins the full brunt of God's wrath was laid on Jesus instead of us the cross was where our notice of debt was sealed and stamped paid in full and through his resurrection he claimed victory over sin and death disarming Satan the one behind all the demonic rulers and authorities of this world Satan threw his full arsenal of weaponry at Jesus deceit threats even death but could not hold him and through his resurrection believers of King Jesus are raised to new life sharing in his victory his victory has freed us from the shackles of sin we are transferred from the pen of the paraded captives to the victor's party far from being a defeat

Jesus was the one who triumphed and Satan was the one humiliated paraded in open shame our friends can you see the stark contrast between what Jesus offers and what false teaching offers false teaching are nothing but empty deceit worthless and can only bring death but Christ's triumph brings fullness to every Christian new life and true freedom remember Christ's glorious triumph for us remember who we are in him and because we have been set free by his victory so we need to hold fast to Jesus so hold fast to Jesus and as we hold fast to the head the whole of the Christian church benefits look with me at verse 19 again where from the head whom the whole body nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments grows with a growth that is from God the whole body refers to the church and as the church locks on to Christ the head notice it's not just a vertical relationship with God but it's also a beautifully interwoven relationship with other Christians knit together growing and maturing as one it's to live our lives with Jesus at the center holding firm to him allowing him to be the director of our lives working on his agenda and not our own and it's to be wise to the lure of false teaching not wavering in the Christian walk and for believers it's committing to serve and invest in one another's lives it's to hold on to one another accountable in prayer it's not to judge but to lovingly correct any false views our friends might have of Christ but to encourage each other in God's word and we do that by remembering what he has already done on the cross so how do we know following

Jesus is worth it how can we have confidence that Jesus is all we need and how can we keep on growing and going in the Christian faith well remember who Jesus is that he is fully God remember his triumph on the cross that he is fully sufficient for us remember who we are in him and that we are complete in him and don't need anything else and hold fast to Jesus our head why don't we pray 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 heavenly father thank you so much for Jesus who's done it all so that we might know full forgiveness and full redemption so help us

[26 : 39] I pray to remember the victory that we already have in him that he is fully sufficient and we don't need anything else and we don't need human wisdom or to do religion or be fooled by spiritual gimmicks please help us every day to remember who Jesus is and hold on to him this week in his most precious name amen