

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
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Colossians 2:10-15 (read vv.8-15) “Our Complete Salvation in Christ”

Intro. As we see from v.8, my text this morning is in a context of warning about false doctrine. Here we see that Paul’s approach against false systems is to emphasize the positive approach. You don’t need to argue against the falsity of a system if you just present the truth of Jesus Christ.

Now there are always going to be those who say that what you have in Jesus Christ is not enough. Many cults and even religions like Islam will say that Jesus was a prophet and had much to offer to us spiritually. But they always say that you need something more. The false teachers of Colossae used a mix of Greek gnostic philosophy, Judaism, and Christianity, and they claimed the Colossian Christians needed circumcision, adherence to Jewish dietary laws and the special knowledge they had to offer *in addition* to belief in Christ. So Paul makes the bold affirmation in v.10, “And you are complete in Him...”

Let me illustrate that truth. When Jesus healed somebody, He made them whole—entirely well, not just partially. Even so, when Jesus heals someone spiritually, He gives a complete salvation. That person becomes entirely well spiritually. John 1:16 says, “And of His fullness we have all received...” (cf. Col. 1:19; 2:9). When you were saved, you established a faith connection to Christ’s fullness. The wholeness of Christ became your wholeness. Once you are truly healed, you don’t need any more medicine. Even so, you don’t need to add anything else to your salvation in Christ. You don’t need human philosophy. You don’t need Jewish legalism. You don’t need some strange mystical or religious experience. You don’t need asceticism, that is abstaining from certain foods (v.16). That may help you physically, but it doesn’t save your soul. You have all you need in Jesus Christ. We only need to more fully appropriate all that we already have in Christ.

Today we also have people that say that you need more than Christ. They say you need the teaching of some later day prophet. Others say you need to discard the old beliefs about Christ and adapt to the latest worldly viewpoints.

So I will show you from our text the three ways in which you are complete in Jesus Christ regarding salvation and a meaningful Christian life. First of all:

I. WE HAVE A COMPLETELY NEW NATURE

However, before we can benefit from our new nature, the old nature must be put away. So notice from our text that by repentance and faith in Christ:

A. The Old Nature Is Put Away – We see this truth stated and illustrated by Paul in vv.11-12. First of all:

1. As Illustrated by Circumcision – In v.11 Paul says, “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.” The false teachers were saying that Gentile Christians needed circumcision. But Paul focuses on the spiritual circumcision they had in Christ, which was far better, which made physical circumcision unnecessary. Yet the physical act of circumcision illustrates the spiritual kind of circumcision. Just as physical circumcision is the cutting away of the foreskin from the body, even so when we truly repent of sin and believe in Christ, God cuts away

from our lives the sins of the old sin nature (cf. Gal. 5:16-20). That's what he means when he says, "putting off the body of the sins¹ of the flesh," The word translated "putting off" (*apekdusis*) is based on the word found in v.15 translated "disarmed," that is, to strip away. The old sin nature has been disarmed of its domineering power. As a result, if you are a true believer, you don't sin like you used to. You leave those sins behind by the power of God.

Unlike physical circumcision, which is an outward act of surgery, this kind of spiritual circumcision is "made without hands." It is not a human act. No priest can do it for you. Christ does it, as he says in the last of v.11 (subjective genitive). Spiritual circumcision is an inward work of God (cf. Rom. 2:28). Only Christ can cut away the old sin nature. We cannot get rid of the sin nature ourselves. We cannot gain victory of sin in our own strength. It is a work of Christ on our behalf. No outward ceremony can remove sin. No amount of self-will can remove the power of indwelling sin.

Paul clearly implies that now that the true circumcision has come, we no longer need the outward symbolism. That's why he insisted that Gentile believers did not have to be circumcised. When a person trusts in the outward rite rather than the inward reality, it does more harm than good. Many Jews believed that it didn't matter whether an Israelite was good or bad, just that he was circumcised. But there were some true spiritual Jews throughout Israel's history who believed that circumcision was only an outward mark of a man who was inwardly committed to God. That was more in line with Paul's teaching.

Furthermore, we see the putting away of the old sin nature:

2. As Illustrated by Baptism – In v.12 Paul says we were "buried with Him in baptism...." Interpreters differ on whether or not Paul has in mind here water baptism, or spiritual baptism. I believe he has both in mind, for water baptism is meaningless without the spiritual baptism, just as circumcision was meaningless without spiritual circumcision. The main point is indeed what water baptism points to: In Christ we have died to the old way of life. We have died to sin.

Some may ask, "If all this is true, then why do we still sin?" Paul answers this in Romans 7:15-17. Though the power of the sin nature has been broken, it is still present within us, and we still can be influenced to sin. Besides, in this life we always have outward temptation by Satan and a sinful world, and we still have a free will to choose to yield to temptation.

Have you put away the old sinful nature by repentance, and bore witness of your commitment by means of baptism? If not, I encourage you to repent of our sins, and present yourself for baptism. You can't have a new nature until you put away the old.

Now Christ has done more than deal with our sin nature. In union with Christ:

B. We Are Given a New Spiritual Life - Salvation is not the improvement of the old nature; it is the impartation of a new life and a new nature. This is first of all pictured in baptism. Just as baptism pictures that we have been "buried with Him," even so it also pictures in the last of v.12 that "you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." If we share in His death and burial, we shall also share in His resurrection life. Likewise, Paul says in v.13, "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses." The only way you can live the Christian life is if you have new life implanted into your soul by God. That is why Jesus said in John 3, "You must be born again."

Notice what brings about this new life. Paul says in v.12 that we "were raised with Him

¹ "of the sins" is missing from older Greek texts.

through faith.” Faith in Christ unites us to Him, and we share in His resurrection life. Furthermore, the new life is imparted by faith “in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” The word “working” (*energeia*) is from the Greek word from which we get the word “energy.” Our God had enough energy and power to create the universe and raise Christ from the dead (cf. Col. 1:16; Eph. 1:19, 20). If He had the power to do that, He certainly has the power to create new life within the believer! Salvation from sin and a new life is accomplished by the resurrection power of God. It’s not accomplished by philosophy, or some religious ritual. It is not accomplished by your own strength and determination, but by the power of a new life, and the power of the Holy Spirit within.

So you do not need anything to be added to the new nature you have been given, except to bring your behavior into harmony with your new nature. Gal. 5:16 says, “Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.” When you receive Jesus, you also receive the Holy Spirit and a new nature. He has also given His holy Word. That’s all you really need!

Another reason we are complete in Christ is because:

II. WE HAVE A COMPLETE FORGIVENESS

To me, the most exciting doctrine in all the Bible is forgiveness. If I felt guilty all the time for my sins and felt like they weren’t forgiven, I’d be a basket case. Forgiveness brings peace and hope for the future. Now notice first of all:

A. Our Need of Forgiveness – Paul says in v.13 that you were “dead in your trespasses....” Likewise, in Eph. 2:1 he says you “were dead in trespasses and sins....” When you were born, you were born spiritually dead, yet physically alive. There was no life connection between you and God. The fact is, we are all separated from the life of God until we are reconciled to God. Our sins create a barrier between us and God. We certainly need forgiveness! We need to have the barrier removed.

Why are we born spiritually dead? Why do we need forgiveness? It is because we and our ancestors have committed “trespasses.” “Trespasses” (*paraptoma*) literally means “a falling beside,” and it suggests failure to follow the path or road charted for man by God. It speaks therefore of a deviation from uprightness and truth. We have violated God’s moral law as the standard of conduct.

Here in v.13 we not only see the need for forgiveness, but also:

B. The Nature of God’s Forgiveness – Paul says in the last of v.13, “He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.” Note first of all that:

1. It Is By Grace - The Greek word translated “forgiven” (*charizomai*) is built on the root of the word for “grace,” means literally “to grant as a favor.” Yes, when God forgives our sins, it is all of grace. It is completely unmerited by man (Rom. 3:24; Titus 3:4-7). It is God’s precious gift in Christ. Furthermore:

2. It Is Complete - “Having forgiven” is past tense, it’s already been accomplished. Notice also that God has “forgiven you all trespasses.” Even those really big sins have been forgiven by God.

Finally, notice:

C. The Means of God’s Forgiveness - Now you tell me who initiates salvation, life so new, so vital, and so liberated that it can be described only by the term “resurrection life”? In verses 9-13

we see “in Him” or “with Him” five times, all referring to Christ. Forgiveness and a new life is all possible only by being in Christ. That’s the key.

So how are our sins forgiven? Paul uses two different pictures of the means of forgiveness.

1. Through Blotting Out Our Sin Debt – Paul says in v.14, “having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us....” “Having wiped out” (*exaleipho*) suggests that this act is the grounds for forgiveness. The Greek word for “handwriting” (*cheirographon*) literally refers to a hand-written document. It could refer to a handwritten note of a debtor acknowledging his indebtedness, a signed confession of debt. Even so, our sin makes us debtors, and sin demands death as payment. The word was also used in ancient times for an indictment drawn up against a prisoner. The rest of v.14 seems to refer to the Law of Moses. The keeping of that Law was contrary to our sin nature, and stood only to condemn us, not to offer us life. But in spite of our debt, and the charges against us, in Christ there is forgiveness of this debt. So what did Christ do? The words “having wiped out” mean “to wipe away” (cf. Acts 3:19). The substance on which ancient documents were written was papyrus, a kind of paper made of the bulrush; or velum, a substance from an animal hide. Both were fairly expensive and wouldn’t be wasted. Since no ancient ink had any acid in it, the ink never bit into the papyrus or the vellum, but laid on the surface. If nobody messed with it, the ink would remain. Sometimes a scribe, in order to reuse his paper because it was expensive, would simply take a sponge and wipe the ink off the papyrus or vellum and use it again.

Even so, here is a picture of many of the sins we have committed. Yet God has wiped our sin debt clean!

However, on what basis did God wipe away our sin debt? Here we see it was possible:

2. Through the Death of Christ on the Cross – Paul says in the last of v.14, “And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” “Has taken” is in the perfect tense, emphasizes abiding results. Christ has removed permanently the I.O.U. and the charges held against us. “Nailing,” an aorist participle, indicates the means by which it has been removed.

I believe that here Paul imagines the Law as nailed above the cross (cf. Eph. 2:15). God wrote a law which I cannot keep, ordinances of which I am guilty of breaking. In a sense that law was an adversary, an accuser of transgressors. When Christ died on that cross, He did not die because He broke them; He was sinless. But it was because I broke them, because I am a sinner; and because you are. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). This, on the deeper view, was the charge on which Christ was put to death.

Now the fact that the Law was nailed to the cross, so to speak, emphasized the following: First, it is the end of the law’s power of punishment. Secondly, it put an end to the ceremonial aspects of the law, such as the dietary and Sabbath laws.

Some of you may remember a special Good Friday service we had in 2013. I invited people to write down their sins on a slip of paper, and then come and nail those sins on a cross in the sanctuary to symbolize repentance and that our sins are truly forgiven through the death of Christ on that cross.

Finally, another reason we are complete in Christ is because:

III. WE HAVE A COMPLETE VICTORY IN CHRIST

V. 15 says, “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.” Here Paul tells of the complete victory of Christ, and in Him, we share in that victory.

Who are these “principalities and powers” that Christ disarmed? He is referring to hostile demonic powers, which include all the spiritual forces of this world which are in rebellion against God. The same words are used in Eph. 6:12 where Paul said, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (cf. Eph 1:21; Col. 1:16). And what has he done to them? He has “disarmed” them. The imagery is that of a conquered antagonist being stripped of his weapons and armor and put to public shame.

The picture, one quite familiar in the Roman world, is that of a triumphant general leading a parade of victory. The conquering General, riding at the front in his chariot, leads his troops through the streets of his home city. Behind them trails a wretched company of vanquished kings, officers, and soldiers—the spoils of battle. Christ, in this picture, is the conquering General; the principalities and powers are the vanquished enemy displayed as the spoils of battle before the entire universe.

And how did Christ obtain this victory? The final word “it” is best understood as a reference to the cross. Satan’s dominion was broken at the cross. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, “...that through death might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil...” Satan and his demonic forces imagined that Christ was their victim², but how wrong they were. Instead of the cross being His defeat, it was the means of His greatest victory! He mastered them even in death. Thus, we read in v.10 of our text that Christ is “the head of all principality and power.”

This is one reason why Paul addresses Christ’s victory in v.15, following his discussion of the forgiveness of sins secured through His work on the cross. Satan is called “the accuser of our brethren” in Rev. 12:10, and no doubt his demons do the same. But by the death of Christ on the cross, Satan has no basis for accusing us, for our sins have been fully paid for!

The people in Colossae feared the demons, the angels, demigods, and even the stars in the scheme of astrology. They tended to view themselves as helpless victims in a hostile cosmos. But now, there is no point in fearing and appeasing principalities or powers that have been vanquished by Jesus. By faith we share in the victory of Christ. We are on the winning side! Because of Jesus Christ we should fear nothing. At the name of Jesus Satan and his demons must flee. What a victory we have in Christ!

Conclusion: Because Christ has given us a completely new nature, a complete forgiveness, and a complete victory over the forces of evil, let us trust in Christ alone for salvation and to live the Christian life. And out of gratitude, let us live lives fully committed to Him, and fully appropriating all that we have in Christ!

Sources: William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964); John MacArthur, Jr., *Complete in Christ: Study Notes on Colossians 1:24-2:23* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1984); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:10] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2011); Curtis Vaughan (through v.13), *Colossians: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

² Jn. 13:27 says, “Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him [Judas]. Then Jesus said to him, ‘What you do, do quickly.’”

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