

Why Is Christ All You Need?

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Colossians: Christ Above All

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Bible Text: Colossians 2:8-15
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Our text tonight comes from Colossians 2:8-15. Colossians 2, beginning to read at verse 8.

8 Watch out lest anyone shall carry you off captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on the tradition of men, centered on the elemental spirits of the universe, and not centered on Christ. 9 Because in him the whole fullness of deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in you have come to fullness of life in him who is the head of every rule and authority; 11 in whom also you were circumcised with a circumcision not done with hands, in the stripping off of the body consisting of the flesh, in the circumcision of the Christ; 12 having been buried together with him in baptism, in which also you were raised together through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And you being dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all trespasses, 14 having wiped away the IOU that was against us with its demands, which was clearly hostile to us; and he took it out of the way when he nailed it to the cross. 15 Having stripped down the rulers and the authorities, he blatantly exposed them, leading them in triumph in it.

There is one of those Peanuts cartoons of Schroeder and Lucy meets as he's making his way home and he has an LP album. For those of you that don't know what that is, ask your uncle. But he had an LP album and Lucy asked him what it was and he says, "It's a new recording of Brahms Fourth Symphony." She said, "Oh, are you going to go home and dance to it?" And he said, "No. I'm just going to go home and listen to it." She said, "Do you mean that you're going to march around the room while you listen to it?" "No. I'm just going to listen to it." She said, "Do you mean you're going to whistle and sing while you listen to it?" "No. I'm just going to sit and listen to it." The point that Schroeder was making was: Brahms is enough. You don't need to juice him up. Brahms is all you need by itself or himself.

That's the point that Paul is making here in Colossians 2:8-15, not Brahms but Christ is all you need, and he hammers that home. That's his point here and then he gives us

reasons why that is so. Now, I don't have these reduced in nice, little, tricky, brief ways of putting it, they're kind of cumbersome but I thought, you know, those folks in the evening, they can take it and so here we go. Christ is all you need, why? Well, because first of all, because of the all-satisfying fullness of Christ's person, verses 8 to 10, because of the all-satisfying fullness of Christ's person. Now, you notice Paul begins in verse 8 by noting a peril or a danger, "Watch out." Apparently there are some false teachers there at Colossae. "Watch out lest they carry you off captive through philosophy and empty deceit." Now, when he says "philosophy," Paul doesn't mean a department of the university or college where you studied at as a discipline, he means philosophy in the sense of a batch of ideas that's out there; another option in the cafeteria of religion, that sort of thing.

Then you notice that he identifies the essence of it when he calls it "empty deceit." There might have been something attractive about this false teaching or deviant teaching at Colossae. It must have been in some way appealing because he says, "Watch that no one carries you off captive." There might have been an appeal, maybe it was in its novelty or maybe it was in its pretense to take them into deeper truth than what they had known before, whatever, it's a dead end street, and Paul says it's based on human tradition or "the tradition of men." It doesn't have divine authority.

Then he also says that the focus of it is, it's centered on, verse 8 there, "centered on the elemental spirits of the universe." That's kind of a cumbersome translation of the word there. Some translations have something like "the basic principles of the world." That could work but I think the elemental spirits of the universe is probably the better translation there. It's a word, this word translated "elemental spirits," it's a word that is used in a quasi-Jewish document around the first century in which the word speaks of the heavenly bodies and then that terminology is defined as "the world rulers of the darkness of this age." So the elemental spirits of the universe are the dark demonic powers that seem to control the fate of people and so on, and apparently the false teachers at Colossae focused heavily on trying to placate these evil powers and to try to gain protection from them, so the elemental spirits of the universe all focused on fixated on that. It's as if these teachers were saying, "Now Jesus is fine as far as he goes but we must work at placating these demonic powers that hound us," and so on.

The focus is not Christ who is the head. Verse 10, he says Christ "is the head of every rule and authority." Rule and authority are other terms used for these unseen evil powers. Christ is already the head of them but this was the focus and the fixation apparently of this false teaching at Colossae.

Now, what's the antidote for this peril of getting sucked into this kind of teaching? Well, part of the antidote or the answer to it is the substantial one, verse 9. "Don't get carried away with this," he says in verse 8, "because," verse 9, "in him," that is, in Christ, "the whole fullness of deity dwells in bodily form." You've got it all in Jesus. The whole glorious total of what God is, as one writer says, is packed in him. You have Jesus, you have everything you need. That's a substantial reason.

And then there's an experiential one in verse 10, "and you have come to fullness of life in him." That's the old Revised Standard Version, an older translation, but it's a little bit paraphrased, we might say, but it catches it pretty well. "You have come to fullness of life in him." Not only is Jesus, not only does the whole fullness of deity dwell, have its home in him, but you also have been satisfied in it. You have come to fullness of life in him. He has satisfied you completely. So you get the trend of the argument.

If that's the case, if you already have that satisfaction in the person of Christ, why are you falling for something far less? The argument is like why do you mess with spam? Now, spam is not just something on your computer, some of you think that, but spam is a meat that you can find in the cheap meat section of your supermarket. I know, there are six different ingredients that are supposed to be, you don't know what's in that stuff. But Paul's argument is essentially, "Why do you mess with eating spam when you have steak?" That's the thrust of it. If Christ so satisfies because of who he is, verse 9, what a staggering claim, then why do you mess with anything less?

The argument is the same as you have, for instance, you see this argument elsewhere. John 1, you remember John 1:1 when he talks about Jesus as the Word, the Word always was God. Not was in the past but the idea is always was God. Then you get to verse 14, "And the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us and we beheld his glory, glory as the only one from the Father, full of grace and truth," which is a phrase culled from Exodus 34, full of covenant love and faithfulness, but in Greek it reads full of grace and truth. Then there's a little parenthesis in John 1:15 about John the Baptist, but then verse 16 really connects with verse 14. So verse 14 says, "we've seen his glory," etc. "full of grace and truth because out of his fullness we all," a little bit emphatic there, "we all have received." Not just Jesus varsity squad, not some elite group of Christians, but we all, blue collar Christian stuff, we all have received grace on top of grace. Or as one translator said, one blessing after another. That's it. It's the same kind of argument. See how Jesus satisfies you.

We have guilt and we've received pardon on top of pardon, and we have weakness and we receive strength on top of strength, and we have fear and we receive assurance on top of assurance, and we have despair and we receive hope on top of hope in Jesus. The reason for this satisfaction is not because Jesus is some emotional pacifier that gives us warm fuzzy feelings but because of who Jesus is, because in him the whole fullness of deity dwells in bodily form and if you have him, you have all you need. He satisfies you and along with that he sometimes gives you warm fuzzy feelings as well. The all-satisfying fullness of Christ's person.

Secondly, Paul says Christ is all you need because of the life giving power of Christ's work, verses 11 through the first part of verse 13, with a life giving power of Christ's work. Now, notice, by the way, the way verse 11 begins and you're used to this now, you're used to Paul just continuing his sentences, right? "In whom," that he's referring Christ, "in whom also," and he just keeps going on and we pointed this out, I think, once before, but it's worth looking at. Isn't that typical vintage Jesus? Paul says, "in whom also." There is always an "also" with Jesus. There is always more with Jesus than you

guess. There is always more that he has than you ever imagine. "In whom also." Yes, that's this Christ that we have.

But now, look at what he says. There may have been, apparently as you look there at verse 11, you see "in whom also you were circumcised with a circumcision not done with hands, in the stripping off of the body consisting of the flesh," etc. and you say, "Oh my, what are we into now?" Well, apparently the teachers at Colossae, the false teachers, were pushing circumcision. I don't know why. Paul doesn't give us, you know, a rundown on the principles of the heresy at Colossae, why would he want to do that? He doesn't want us to go buying into it so why spell it all out, but there are these hints and I don't think that Paul here would be speaking about circumcision unless that was something that the deviant teachers were trying to push on the folks at Colossae.

But he says, "we have been circumcised with a circumcision done without hands," and so on. Now, you might say, "Boy, I wish we could get away from why does this circumcision stuff come up?" Well, it was a problem. They were pushing it and apparently the teachers at Colossae might have said something like, "Well, again, Jesus is okay but there needs ought to be an extra measure of consecration or devotion. You ought to go further than that. You ought to receive if you're a Gentile, for instance, you ought to receive the covenant mark of circumcision." What was circumcision anyway? Well, it was the surgical operation that consisted of the removing of a foreskin of the male sexual organ that was usually carried out on male infants on the eighth day after birth and according to Genesis 17, it was a brand mark, you might say, of consecration to God, that one was included in covenant with God and so on. Now, what you have here apparently they were pressing that there was a certain Jewish element, you might say, in this false teaching that this circumcision was essential in some way in either gaining favor with God or whatever. It was part of their philosophy or their batch of ideas that they were putting across.

Now, as you notice there, you notice what Paul says though to the Colossian believers, "You were circumcised with a circumcision not done with hands." Now, what does that word mean because it's one word, "not done with hands." It means supernatural. It means that it wasn't just a sheer minor surgical operation but it was something supernatural that was done. It was in fulfillment of the promise of Yahweh made to Israel in Deuteronomy 30:6 where it says, Moses says, "And Yahweh your God shall circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul." He'll do a circumcision within. He'll do a real circumcision, one not done with hands. Supernatural. You know, that's what he's speaking of here and this is what Paul alludes to.

Now you notice what he says it consists of, this supernatural circumcision consists of "the stripping away," something that might be used in describing literal circumcision, but "in stripping away the body consisting of the flesh." Now, I take that as being Paul's...I know there are different opinions on it, we can't go into every opinion, Paul takes the flesh there, I think, as referring to that hostile God-opposed attitude and disposition that men and women have outside of Christ. So as one writer has said, it's the whole personality

organized for and geared into rebellion against God. That's the flesh. And this is nullified and negated in this supernatural transformation. So Paul says, "You Colossian believers have a supernatural circumcision that's an internal transformation worked by God and is not some mere external operation." Now, that's the fact that he stresses with them.

Now, he says there is a sign of that fact, of that supernatural work in transformation on you and it's in baptism, verse 12. Notice that he refers to this as this transformation and so on in the last of verse 11 as "the circumcision of the Christ." Now, I know there are about three or four different ways to take that. I think "the Christ" there is a title. You could translate it "in the circumcision of the Messiah," or you could just translate it "in the messianic circumcision."

What is that circumcision, that circumcision not done with hands? Well, the sign of it is in baptism. Notice how he goes on in verse 12, being therefore "buried together with him in baptism, in which," and I take that as referring to baptism, "you were also raised together through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead." So this transformation is signified in baptism and sometimes this is portrayed as just as you go down into the water and are buried there and then you are raised up together, so we are buried with Christ and we are raised up, well, you've got to watch it, it's not quite like that because, you see, Jesus wasn't buried six feet under with gobs of dirt on top of him. His being buried was not going down under but crossing over into the tomb in the garden. You might say Jesus was buried above ground. So being buried together is being buried, it's as if you go into the garden tomb with him. You are identified with him and you are entombed with him and then God raises you up as he raised Jesus. You are raised up together to walk in newness of life as in Romans 6.

Now, Paul, again though, that's what's signified in your baptism and then in verse 13, Paul comes back again to an explanation of this that basically repeats in different terminology what he said in verse 11. As you notice in verse 13, he harks back to that and he says, "Now what were you before this change? Well, you were dead, being dead in your trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh." Now, the uncircumcision of your flesh, that's you are unchanged; you're dead in your trespasses so you're lifeless and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, you're unchanged. That nature, that hostile anti-God disposition has not been changed. That's a pretty severe description of their former state. That's pretty serious. It's pretty bleak. You can't do much with dead people, being dead in your trespasses. He didn't say you were feverish, he didn't say you were sick, he didn't say that you were distressed, he said you were dead in your trespasses. You can't do much with dead people even though sometimes you might try.

Dr. Thomas and I had a colleague at Reformed Seminary a few years back, I remember was telling a story that took place in Alabama. There was a family that, I don't know, the grandpa or the great uncle or somebody had died, we'll say it was a grandpa and so on. And they were having there in the funeral, his corpse was in the casket and so on and there they were, they were gathered together and as they were talking on this occasion they said, "You know, we never had a family picture taken with grandpa. We need to do that." So, well, they went and they got him up out of the casket, it was kind of a stiff

proposition, and they got him up vertically and toted him out under a tree with the rest of the family gathered round and kind of propping him up and they took their family picture. I don't know, it may have looked like he was squinting or maybe that he blinked when the flash went off or what, but they got it and so on. Then they put him back in the casket and someone said that it's a good thing a twig didn't pierce his foot or something and drain the embalming fluid out, they could have had a real mess. I don't know about that stuff. But at any rate, he is still dead. You can do that. You can take a picture etc. etc. but he's still a corpse on his feet. But he's still a corpse. He's dead. You can't do anything with dead people. Dead people don't respond to the Gospel. They're dead.

Dead in your trespasses. Lifeless and unchanged in your uncircumcision of your flesh. Then you notice what Paul says, it's almost like a dash and an exclamation, "he made you alive," that is God, "he made you alive together with him." He was the one who gave life. It's as if God activated what Christ did for you in his burial and resurrection, in his death and in his resurrection. It's as if God activated what he did for you there and as he rose, you have risen to walk in newness of life. It's almost as if Paul is saying that in his death and resurrection, Christ not only does something for you, he also does something to you and so you have new desires and you have a new outlook and you have new pleasures and you have new affections and you have new obedience and you have new purposes. There's that life-giving power of Christ's work. Does it make any difference? I think so.

Leon Morris tells that story of a fellow who had been a drunkard and had been transformed by Christ, come to faith in him, and he met some of his old friends and they were cynical and they were skeptical about this change and they said, "You don't mean to tell us that you really believe the Bible? Do you believe that stuff about Jesus turning water into wine?" He said, "Well, I don't know about that but I know in my house he's turned beer into furniture." That's it, the life-giving power of Christ's work and because of that, he is all you need.

Now, Christ is all you need, thirdly, because of the guilt-freeing relief of Christ's cross, the last of verse 13 and verse 14. Because of the guilt-freeing relief of Christ's cross. You notice how Paul at the end of verse 13 says not only did God make us alive together with him but he forgave us all trespasses. How total it is, all of them. Then you notice how graphic his picture is. There are about two or three word pictures, you might say, in verse 14, "having wiped away the IOU that was against us," kind of a statement of charges that we've signed and we're indebted and he has wiped it away, the demands of God's law and of commandments and of our own conscience pressing against us. No doubt the word used there is really an IOU and he wiped it clean. It stood against us and that's what "he took out of the way," or what he has taken out of the way, "when he nailed it to the cross," as if perhaps the picture is nailing it to the cross puts it out of the reach of anyone else and they can't use it against you. Graphic word pictures. But then perhaps we need to see above everything else how needed this guilt-freeing relief is. I'm not sure we always realize just how deep sin has cut its shaft into our lives. Oh, I know we say, "Well, we all make mistakes," and if you're a little more Christian, you'll say, "Well, we're all sinners," and so on, but we kind of treat it a little bit lightly. I'm not sure we realize just how desperate we are here.

I've told you about Rabbi Duncan or Dr. John Duncan, the strange Old Testament professor in the Free Church of Scotland in the 1800s, about 1840 or so. Rabbi Duncan, as he was called, was a strange dude. The Lord made John Duncan and then threw away the mold and there is no one like John Duncan. But even though he was a little eccentric, he could be very profound and he died when he was 75 years old. Three years before he died on one evening, he was looking back on his life and as he was sitting there apparently among company, he broke out into a soliloquy and this is what he said on that Sabbath evening. "There are heaps of things in the past, mercies, sins, forgivenesses. In 70 years and better, there's a great deal to look back to. Alas, I have never done a sinless action during it all. I've never done a sinless action during the 70 years. I don't say that by God's grace there may have been some holy action done, but never a sinless action during the 70 years. What an awful thing is human life and what a solemn consideration it should be to us that we have never done a sinless action in all our life; that we have never done one act that did not need to be pardoned." Well, you might say, "Well, I beg to differ with Dr. Duncan." Well, maybe you do but do you see what he's saying? He's saying, do you really understand how sin has infected and infested everything, even as a believer? Do you see what a desperate state you are in and how desperately you need the forgiveness that comes from Christ's cross? How needful it is?

But Paul says, "That IOU of your guilt, it's nailed to the cross." You say, "I thought it said it was wiped away?" Yes, that too. Not everything was wiped away. Jesus' charge was nailed up to the cross, wasn't it? You can see it in Mark 15:26, "The King of the Jews." Jesus' charge was nailed to the cross and as we walk closer to the cross, maybe you can see yours there as well. I don't mind taking you to see mine. It's there. You have to get a little closer. I can see Jesus' charge, that's easy to see, but I need to get a little closer to see the writing on mine. Oh, when I get close enough I can see in bold letters my name at the top but I can't see the other stuff. I think it's because there are so many charges against me that it had to be put in very fine small print in order to get it on the document and I have to get close enough to read it, and then when I do, I realize it's blank. There isn't any writing on my IOU. He has wiped it away and there is no place else where I or you can get such relief. Christ is all I need because of the guilty-freeing relief of his cross.

Now, Paul says there's another reason Christ is all you need. Christ is all you need, he says in verse 15, because of the public humiliation of Christ's enemies. The public humiliation of Christ's enemies. Now, the text here in verse 15 is rather difficult in some ways. We don't know exactly if God or Christ is the subject of the verbs involved and we don't know, you'll notice in your translation, that the last phrase or the last word, we don't know whether it could be "in him," referring to Christ, or it could be "in it," referring to the cross, but those, in one sense, are minor difficulties.

You notice what's identified there in verse 15, you notice that he says that Christ in his work on the cross has "stripped away," or "stripped down the rulers and the authorities." Now, the rulers and authorities, that's sort of a synonym for that strange phrase, "the elemental spirits of the universe" that we mentioned earlier. These are the unseen evil

powers and it's as if Christ has stripped them down and "he blatantly exposed them, leading them in triumph in the cross."

Now, these rulers and authorities he referred to here, let's just notice a couple of things about them. These are the unseen powers of evil. These are Satan's unseen mafia or as Dick Lukas calls them, terrorists from hell. Notice that Paul does not say that these do not exist. He doesn't pooh-pooh it as if belief in the unseen demonic powers that are hostile to God's people is a lot of bunk. He doesn't call this pagan hogwash. He doesn't think that, in one sense, concern and anxiety and even fear over these unseen evil powers, he doesn't think it's a lot of bunk but he points the believers in Colossae to Christ's victory over them in the cross. He refers to Christ as "leading them in triumph," in his triumph, these unseen, malice-laden, Christian-hating powers. Christ is supreme over them as Creator, chapter 1, verse 16, and he has trounced them at the cross. He leads them in his triumphal procession. That last phraseology there, "leading them in triumph," has the view of probably a triumphal procession of a Roman general who would go to Rome and he would be at the forefront, perhaps, of the triumphal procession and so on, and then his victorious army behind him, and then the booty and the plunder that they took in their victory, and then lastly the defeated king and people whom they overcame and enslaved coming in disgrace and so on behind them.

Well, Jesus in the cross has conquered these hostile, unseen, demonic powers and he leads them in triumph but it didn't look like that, did it? When you look at the cross, it doesn't look like that's Jesus' triumph, it looks like that's the desolation of Jesus; it looks like that's the annihilation of Jesus and his cause; it looks like that was anything but a victory. But appearances are not all what they seem to be.

I don't want to demean this but I want you to grasp the principle of it and so I refer you to a time in the 1950s when there was a minor league baseball player, actually a player/manager by the name of Jack McKeon. He played for a Missoula, Montana team, and on one occasion he was catching for the game and he was hunched behind the plate and as the batter, the opposing batter swung, his catcher's mitt just got a little bit in the way of the batter's swing and ticked the bat. Well, it was interference on McKeon's part and umpire, George S., awarded the batter first base which is a proper call. Then though Jack McKeon heard the crowd booing and he thought he would just have a little fun with that and so he ripped off his catcher's mask and he snarled at the umpire, "That was a good call, George. I certainly did tip the bat." Well, the umpire wasn't sure he heard what McKeon had said and so the catcher continued with the charade. Much to the fans' delight, he waved his mask and he kicked the dirt with his feet and he stuck his face up against the umpire's and he said, "I said it was a good call. You're right. I did interfere with the batter." The umpire said to him, "Are you feeling alright, McKeon? Are you sick or something?" And he said, "I sure am. Can't a guy have a little fun for the benefit of the hometown fans?" And this umpire was bewildered and he tried to walk away from McKeon and you know how some of these fellows when they get real hot about something, they just walk around the umpire. He tries to walk away and they just keep circling around him and that's what McKeon was doing and still acting, the booing grew louder, and the umpire said to McKeon, "Do you want the fans to kill me just because

you're having fun?" And McKeon began to tear his hair as if in frustration and he said, "They won't hurt you, George. Don't be a spoilsport. Let's have some laughs." Finally, the umpire had had enough and he said, "McKeon, if you don't stop this, I'll throw you out of the game." "You can't throw me out for saying you made a good decision," etc. etc. Well, he finally calmed down.

Think about how the crowd would look at that. How would they, if they wanted to comment on that little episode, how would they speak about it? Someone would say to his friend, "Whoa, McKeon was hot about...boy, did he disagree with that call. He was...I never saw someone so rabidly disagreeing," on and on and on and so on. That's the way they would think and they would be completely wrong. That wasn't it at all. That's not what he said at all but that's what they would think was the case. And there is a superficial way of looking at the cross of Jesus and you think it's utter defeat, you think it was anything but a victory but Paul says, "Oh no. No, that cross was Jesus' lethal weapon against all his and our enemies." The cross was his victory chariot. Not only has Jesus taken care of your sin and your guilt, but Jesus has cleaned the clock of every power that would seek to destroy and to control and to enslave you. That's how you're free to move about the kingdom.

There was one of John and Charles Wesley's associates, well, he later became their associate, his name was John Cennick. John Cennick was a young man, I think he had grown up in the church, the Anglican church. He wasn't converted yet but there was something that led to his conversion eventually. John Cennick said that he remembers his great aunt on her deathbed, she was his mother's aunt, and he was so impressed with the testimony she had as she lay dying. What she said was, giving a vigorous testimony of her assurance of salvation, "Who calls me poor? I am rich in Christ. I have got Christ, I am rich. This night the Lord stood by me and invited me to drink of the fountain of life freely and I shall stand before him bold as a lion." Cennick said that testimony so engraved itself in his gray matter that he couldn't get away from it. He would punch the mental replay button and it would keep coming back to him again and again, this aged saint who could say, "I am rich in Christ. I have got Christ, I'm rich." I wonder as you start the ignition tonight to go home in your vehicle, if you can say that. "I have got Christ. I am rich." And if you have him, what else do you need?

Let us pray.

Our Lord, we pray that we might be able to say truly as the hymn says, "Thou, O Christ, are all I want, more than all in thee I find." O Jesus, fountain of living waters, grant that we would always be satisfied with your fullness that overflows to us in all your goodness. Amen.