

COMPLETE IN JESUS CHRIST

(SUNDAY, JANUARY 18, 2015)

Scripture Reading: Psalm 27; Col. 2:6-10

INTRODUCTION

I have summarized the message of Colossians before with two questions.

Who is Jesus Christ?

What does it mean to follow Him?

The verses that we consider from Colossians 2, can be called the central verses of the book as they again direct our attention to who Jesus Christ is and what that means for you.

I would encourage sometime to look through the entire book of Colossians from the perspective of these two questions. It is not that every verse only concerns these two questions, but I think you will see how the book is focused on these two concerns.

Recall also a familiar pattern that you see throughout the NT. The pattern is that Scripture first describes who you are by God's grace and then it calls you to do something because of the grace that you have been given.

In more technical language, the indicative leads to the imperative.

The indicative – who are you in light of God's mercy and grace?

The imperative – what does God call you to do?

We see this pattern directly in verse 6.

In our text today, I want you to see how both who you are because of God's grace and what you are called to do is connected with who Jesus Christ is.

As I studied these verses I was struck by three things – God's grace, our duty, and again the glory and sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

This is how I want to approach this text looking at God's gracious work, your duty, and then the glory and sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

You are complete in Him. Know the glory sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

1. GOD'S GRACIOUS WORK IN JESUS CHRIST

We have already seen how the book of Colossians begins and ends with a message of God's undeserved grace.

Look at **Col. 1:2**.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then look at the final verse of Colossians.

Col. 4:18 This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace *be* with you. Amen.

What is the message of God's grace that we see in verses 6-10?

There are three things that I will highlight.

The first testimony to God's grace is that God sent to the Colossians those who faithfully preached to them the message of the gospel.

Where do we see this in verse 6?

We see it especially in the verb received.

The verb received is a technical term, used in other places in the NT.

Listen to three other passages that use this same verb.

1 Cor. 11:23 For I **received** from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread

1 Thes. 2:13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you **received** the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

2 Thes. 3:6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he **received** from us.

Who faithfully preached the message of Jesus Christ the Lord to the Colossians?

Look back to the last part of Col. 1:6 and verse 7.

since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; **7** as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf,

God in His infinite wisdom and grace sent to the city of Colossae and faithful minister of Christ to bring the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior.

It was then also by God's grace that the believers in Colossae received the message of salvation. They received Christ Jesus the Lord.

This is something that the world cannot understand for it is something supernatural.

To receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior comes only through God's sovereign and gracious work.

As Paul says in other places, the message of Jesus Christ crucified to bear our sin is a message of foolishness to the world, and yet by God's grace is the message that we receive and believe unto salvation.

1Cor. 1:18 For the message of the cross is **foolishness** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Many people look for some powerful experience as a sign of God speaking to them.

They want a vision or a dream.

And it is true that God has revealed Himself to some like the Apostle Paul in a very powerful way.

Let us not despise the main way that God continues to show His grace and mercy to sinners.

He does so through His Word of truth and through those who faithfully preach His truth.

If you believe and trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, if you confess that Jesus Christ is Lord that He is the risen Savior and King, then God has powerfully shown His grace to you in giving you new spiritual life and faith to receive this message.

And God's grace does not end with the receiving of this message of salvation.

Verse 7 speaks of God's continuing work of grace.

In verse 7 there are four verbs used to describe how we are to continue to walk in Christ.

The first three of these verbs interestingly do not speak of what we do but focus on God's gracious work.

Let us take a look at these three verbs.

It is interesting that Paul in verse 6 speaks of walking in Christ Jesus.

Then in verse 7 he uses verbs that speak of horticulture and architecture.

The first verb is rooted which here might be better translated as having been rooted.

This speaks of God's gracious work in your life not something you have done.

It is possible that Paul has in mind the beautiful picture of Psalm 1 – the language of our union with Christ in terms of being like a tree planted by rivers of water.

This is how a Christian passes through all challenges and trials of life – if you have been rooted in Christ, then you will stand.

Now this also is a reminder of where you must always look for strength.

Are you looking to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Are you trusting in the great promises of His Word?

The next verb that is used in verse 7 seems to switch now to the world of architecture – built up in Him.

It is interesting that in 1 Cor. 3, Paul also switches from the language of plants to the language of building.

Here the verb speaks of a continuing work that God does in the life of the believer.

You have been rooted in Christ. And God continues now to build up those who are in Him.

The third verb is **established**.

The meaning of being established is to be strengthened as we see how this verb is used in the OT.

Psa. 119:28 My soul melts from heaviness; **Strengthen** me according to Your word.

How is the believer established or strengthened? Psalm 119:28 says it is through the Word of God. This is perfectly in agreement with what Paul says here.

Established in the faith is not your own personal faith but here it means the truth of God's Word that was given to them.

Now there are other places in Scripture which call you to seek after God's truth.

Here the emphasis is that this is God's work in your life.

May praise always be given to His name!

2. YOU ARE CALLED TO WALK IN HIM AND WATCH OUT!

There are two main commands from our passage and one accompanying description.

What are the two commands?

Verse 6 – Walk in Him

Verse 8 – Beware

The accompanying description is given at the end of verse 7 – abounding in it with thanksgiving.

Let us consider these duties.

Both the OT and NT speak of life as walking.

Part of the reason must have been that people spent a great deal of time walking from one place to another.

Some of you might walk for exercise or even run, but still we would not nearly do the amount of walking that people did in ancient times.

In Psalm 1, the description is not walking in the counsel of the ungodly.

Here the call is walk in Christ.

In Col. 1:10, Paul's prayer for the Colossians was that they would **walk worthy of the Lord**, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

So here we again have such a beautiful statement of what your life should look like.

Can your life be described as walking in Christ?

We will spend the rest of our lives seeking to demonstrate this reality.

Consider here three things that must be part of walking in Christ.

Truth

Dependence

Motivation

The end of verse 7 again speaks of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is referred to at least 6 or 7 times in this short book.¹

There is no way possible that you can know the grace of God truly and not be filled with thanksgiving and praise to the God who has saved you.

Martin Luther once said, “If we knew what we had been saved from, we would die of fear. If we knew what we had been saved unto, we would die of joy.”

Truly our thanksgiving is based on all that God has done for us in delivering us from His just wrath and hatred and in His present work of grace and the glorious future that awaits us!

The second main duty is given in verse 8.

Col. 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Throughout Scripture you find warnings.

The first duty given to Adam and Eve was expressed in terms of a warning.

Here the warning is that you will be carried off as a captive through the false teaching.

While we fully rest in God’s grace and sovereign keeping, this doesn’t mean that we live a life exempt from seeking to be aware of danger.

The Christian must be aware precisely because we believe the truth of God is so vital and important.

It is not that God’s Word needs protection or is fragile.

Rather it is the reality that we can be led astray that gives rise to the many warnings found in God’s Word.

This does not mean we abandon the message of salvation by God’s grace and say that it all depends upon you and your performance.

¹ Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians–Philemon* (WBC 44; Accordance/Thomas Nelson Electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 108.

Not at all.

But you are called to seriously consider the many warnings that Scripture gives.

Some are led astray who never were true believers.

But I think we have to also be able to say that true believers can be led astray not to the point of losing God's gift of salvation but to the point of being taken captive with all sorts of consequences that come as a result.

John Calvin here wrote:

“Would you then be reckoned as belonging to Christ's flock? Would you remain in his folds? **Do not deviate a nail's breadth from purity of doctrine.** For unquestionably Christ will act the part of the good Shepherd by protecting us if we but hear his voice, and reject those of strangers. In short, the tenth chapter of John is the exposition of the passage before us.”

As we have noted before, the exact nature of the heretical teaching is not known.

The false teachers likely called their teaching a “philosophy.”

Even those who practiced magic called themselves “philosophers.”

Paul calls their philosophy empty deceit.

It is simply just the tradition of men rather than the truth of God.

The expression “basic principles of the world” is a difficult expression. Literally in Greek the word means elements, *stoicheia*, a word used in chemistry.

John Calvin believed it referred to Jewish ceremonies such as circumcision, and you see that in verse 11 Paul speaks about this subject.

Many modern commentators believe this expression refers to “spiritual beings, regarded as personal and active in the physical and heavenly elements.”

Peter O'Brien writes:

It is probable that in the syncretistic teaching being advocated at Colossae these ‘elements’ were grouped with the angels and seen as controlling the heavenly realm and man's access to God's presence. One way they could be placated was by rigorously

subduing the flesh so as to gain visionary experiences of the heavenly dimension and to participate in their angelic liturgy.²

We don't have to know the exact error of what the Christians in Colossae were facing.

What we have to beware of is any teaching that is simply according to the tradition of men and that is not according to Christ.

Are you aware of the people, activities, or other influences that are pulling you away from the Lord Jesus Christ?

3. THE GLORY AND SUFFICIENCY OF JESUS CHRIST

As I studied this text I became convinced that verses 9 and 10 are the key to understanding what this passage says about God's grace and our respective duty.

Your greatest duty and the greatest expression of God's grace to you are that you would see the true nature and glory of who Jesus Christ is.

Verse 6 speaks of Jesus Christ the Lord.

There are two essential things we see in this statement.

Jesus is the Messiah or the Christ. He is the promised seed of the woman from Genesis 3:15 who would crush the head of the serpent.

Jesus is Lord.

He is in the terminology of the OT, Jehovah or Yahweh.

He has been given the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on the earth, and of those under the earth.

Verse 9 again affirms that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in the Lord Jesus Christ bodily.

The word bodily is used only this one time in the NT and so there is question on how it should be best understood and translated.

² O'Brien, 132.

The best understanding of this expression is to say that the fullness of God is expressed in bodily form in the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

And you are complete in Him.

The word complete is related to the word fullness.

In Jesus Christ you have every spiritual resource and provision that you could ever need.

Why would you then seek some intermediary, be it an angel, a saint, Mary, or anything else to help you seek after God?

If we are truly complete in God, then why do we so often still seek for satisfaction in other things?

If we are truly complete in the Lord Jesus Christ, then why would we seek our identity in anything but in Him?

He is the head of all principality and power. So why do we not more often seek His strengthening and help?

It is as you consider the glory and sufficiency of Jesus Christ that you understand why you are commanded then to walk in Him and to beware of being led astray.

CONCLUSION:

You are complete in Him. Know the glory sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Hymn: 135

Benediction – Philippians 4:19-20

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.