

Colossians: Jesus Our Fullness

Colossians 2:8-23

The story so far. Growing in the Christian life is about understanding and relying on what God has done for us in Christ.

We can be confident in Jesus because of who He is—the full image of God—and what He has done—dying to reconcile a rebellious world to God.

Because Jesus is fully God and His victory is total, it is foolish and useless to move on from Him. Instead, we should grow stronger in our love for and obedience to Him.

The Big Idea. Christ has done everything we need to be reconciled to God through His death on the cross. If we add anything to Christ, we will only subtract our confidence.

Summary. Paul now goes into much greater detail about the nature of the false teaching prevalent in Colossae. Because of his need to explain the issue of circumcision (2:11), it seems clear that a central element of this was the expectation for Gentile converts to keep the Jewish law in its entirety.

Paul uses shocking language to describe the false teachers' approach: for despite the law's divine origins, their insistence on applying it directly to new Gentile believers renders their philosophy one of "human tradition and basic principles of this world" (2:8).

The key reason for Paul's robust language is that to insist on people adopting human traditions, as well as the gospel, completely undermines Jesus' victorious achievements at the cross, which in turn undermines a Christian's sense of assurance.

Are we doing things, thinking things, refusing things, or observing things believing they reconcile us to Christ? If so, we are undermining Jesus' victorious achievements of the at the cross.

Talk about: What images spring to mind with words like "holiness" and "spirituality"?

Paul now draws together some of the big ideas from the last three sections—applying the significance of Jesus' identity more closely to lives of the Colossians and the struggles they were facing.

Investigate: Read Colossians 2:8-15.

1. The message of Christ is different from the hollow and deceptive philosophies of human tradition because the origin of the way of life through Christ is from God. The

alternatives are all from human invention. Whatever the roots of other particular ways of life, if it undermines the work of Christ, then it is by definition not from God.

- The other major difference would be that alternatives will sound great, whereas the true gospel will not pull any punches about how difficult it will be.
- Paul is not referring to pagan thinking here—in fact he is challenging the mindset that insists on Gentile converts to Christ having to keep the Jewish law (hence the imagery of circumcision)

2. In **Genesis 17:9-14**, we see that the purpose of circumcision in the Old Testament was to be a physical sign of the covenant between God and His people. It showed that you belonged to God's chosen people. It marked you as different.

- In **Colossians 2:11**, when Paul speaks of the circumcision of Christ, he is speaking of a spiritual circumcision that Christ does at our conversion when we first trust Him (“through your faith in the power of God”).

3. The three enemies are destroyed by Jesus' death on the cross?

Through His death, Christ brought forgiveness and reconciliation to God by removing the three major obstacles that lie in a sinner's way:

- Death, which is the inevitable consequence of rebellion against God (**2:13**).
- Our failure to obey God's standards of perfection as expressed in the law (“the written code...that stood opposed to us”—**2:14**).
- The powers and authorities that stand opposed to God and His people (**2:15**).

He did this by:

- Rising from the dead and enabling those in Christ to follow suit (**2:13**).
- Taking the punishment deserved by spiritual failures on Himself at the cross (**2:14**)—sin is never punished twice which is why we no longer have anything to fear.

Far from being a defeat, ironically, the cross was where God overcame hostile spiritual forces. Paul uses the imagery of a Roman triumph—a great procession of captured enemies through the streets of Rome. They marched the captives through the streets before imprisonment or being killed.

4. The cross now makes the desire to keep the Jewish law only an expression of human tradition because we are naturally drawn to any religion that expects us to contribute good works to earn a place with God, since it appeals to our innate pride in thinking that our contribution will have an impact. Our sin is so dire and serious that it leaves us spiritually dead. *Only Jesus* can help us. Following traditions to feel good or to give us a feeling of pride will not help.

5. Many today suggest that it is arrogant to be confident that you are right with God. How would you respond to them?

6. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of having the “full assurance of faith” (**Hebrews 10:22**). Is this something that you have? If so, praise God for it! If not, what is preventing it?

Investigate: Read Colossians 2:16-23.

7. Why is the Jewish law no longer needed? The law was a “shadow” of things that were to come in Jesus. Once He is here, we have the reality. There is no need to return to the law (**v. 16**), e.g., the sacrificial system, food laws to show us living differently from other.
8. The spiritual dangers for someone who tries to keep the law in this way (**vv. 17-19**) are: 1) their humility will become a sham because they are still arrogantly relying on their own performance, and 2) worshipping angels will cause people to rely on spiritual experiences which can lead to spiritual pride (puffed up). “I had this experience, and you didn’t, I’m better than you or more spiritual!”
9. (**vv. 20-23**). The rule-keeping mentioned in these verses might help false teachers determine who is in their clique and who is not. But these things have no value from an eternal perspective because they are “based on human commands.” Sin can show itself in very religious ways just as it can in pagan or irreligious ways.

Explore More. Read Matthew 5:17-18. How did Jesus understand His relationship to the law?

- He fulfills the purpose for which it was given—for example, the sacrificial system was designed to be a shadow of what Jesus would achieve on the cross. So even though it is no longer in use, we need to study it in order to understand the cross.
- Uniquely, He kept the law perfectly—He alone succeeded where the Old Testament people of God failed.
- He took on Himself the requirements of the law by suffering the punishment demanded by human failure to be holy.

APPLY: Christians today can fall into the same trap as the false teachers in Colossae. Let’s look at some unnecessary rules or purely cultural conventions that we might expect new Christians to keep. Our tendency is to twist the good gifts of God and wise habits of the Christian life into things that cause us spiritual problems.

- We can easily twist the habit of having a regular devotional time with God into something that determines our status before God.
- We can think that if we have a quiet time, our day will automatically go better than if we don’t, or that God will be impressed with us.

APPLY: Are you in danger of adding to Christ and His work? Look at the following statements . How do they make you feel, and how would you respond? These three statements reflect the three different ways of adding to Christ's work in these verses.

1. "If I don't start the day with prayer and reading my Bible, everything else goes wrong." *Legalism (vv. 16-17)*: law-keeping makes me feel more acceptable to God.
2. "Christians spend too much time talking to God, and not enough time just patiently waiting to hear His still, small voice." *Mysticism (vv. 18-19)*: spiritual experiences make me feel more acceptable to God.
3. "I didn't feel I was truly following Christ until I gave up the trappings of materialism—my car, the TV, eating meat. The simple life brings me closer to God." *Asceticism (vv. 20-23)*: self-denial make me feel more acceptable to God. People who talk like this can make us feel guilty or unconfident.

Pray: **Thank God** for the freedom from human regulations and expectations that we have in Christ. **Ask God** to help you have the full assurance of faith, having confidence in Christ's finished work on the Cross.

Homework: Jesus Our Lifestyle. Read **Colossians 3:1—4:1**