



THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST -- COLOSSIANS 2

INTRODUCTION

In chapter one, Paul established the supremacy of Christ. Christ is God Himself in human flesh, the preexistent creator of all things and the reason for the coherence of the universe. As the head of the church, He is the singular reconciler of man to God. Therefore, Christ is preeminent over the church and over all creation.

Chapter two now takes us into the polemical section of the letter where Paul confronts the false teachings which were threatening to lead the Colossian believers astray. He exposes these teachings as erroneous and ineffectual. Paul's purpose is to encourage the hearts of his readers with a true understanding of what Christ has done for them and to establish them in their faith.

OUTLINE OF COLOSSIANS 2

- I. Treasures of Knowledge Are in Christ Alone - Colossians 2:1-15
- II. Traditions of Men are of No Value - Colossians 2:16-23

I. Treasures of Knowledge Are In Christ Alone - Colossians 2:1-15

All the Christian's needs are met in Christ alone. He is our foundation, our truth, and our completeness. There is no need to look beyond Him because He is the full provision from God.

- A. Encouragement Comes from Being Firmly Rooted in Christ - Colossians 2:1-5

1. Full assurance is in Christ - 2:1-2

It is likely that Paul had never met his readers personally or shared the gospel with them face to face. But his overwhelming desire was that they fully understand the riches which were theirs in Christ. To this end, he greatly struggled (NASB) for them. The struggle most likely alludes to his own prayers on their behalf (compare with Colossians 4:12). To what extent do you struggle in prayer for others?

Both Paul's prayers and his purpose in writing centered around his desire to encourage the hearts of his readers. He knew they needed an inner strength to enable them to stand firm in the face of the popular worldly philosophies. Paul's desire was that the Colossians

have *the full assurance of understanding* (Colossians 2:2) in order to be convinced of God's true knowledge and the riches which were theirs in Christ. So in this section of his letter, Paul explains clearly and fully the treasure which believers possess in Christ. He precisely presents Jesus Christ as singularly sufficient. This knowledge is basic and necessary for every Christian. Do you know that Jesus Christ is sufficient to meet your every need? Do you rely upon Him to meet your every need?

2. All Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge are Hidden in Christ - 2:3-5

The Greek word for *hidden* is "apokruphos." The spiritual writings which contained the hidden knowledge and wisdom of the pagan philosophers were called the "apokruphos," so Paul used a play on words here. The point he makes is that there is no hidden knowledge apart from Christ. Jesus Christ is the source and sufficiency of all true knowledge. Paul had already stated in Colossians 1:17 that in Christ *all things consist* (hold together). It would then be logical to say that He holds within Himself all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3).

Paul knew that an understanding of the full sufficiency of Christ was necessary to prevent deception by persuasive philosophies (Colossians 2:4). His readers needed to remain firm in the truth of the gospel. Although Paul was in prison far from Colossae, he was with them in spirit, rejoicing in the knowledge that they were in *good order* (disciplined, NASB) and steadfast in their faith. The words *order* and *steadfastness* in verse 5 are military terms in the Greek. Paul saw the Colossian believers as soldiers lined up in an orderly way for battle, presenting a solid front against the attacks of false teachings. His own teaching would encourage their perseverance in the truth. All Christians need encouragement to persevere in the truth. Who will you encourage this week?

- B. Established Faith Walks in Christ - Colossians 2:6-8

1. In obedience - 2:6-7

Having given words of encouragement, Paul goes on to exhort his readers to live out the truth they have been taught. Obedience to Christ is not an option but a necessity. Paul says, *walk in Him* (Colossians 2:6). The apostle John exhorted his readers in the same manner: *He who says he abides in Him ought himself*

also to walk just as He walked (1 John 2:6). Peter called his readers to, *Follow His steps* (1 Peter 2:21). All these echo Jesus' own admonition, *For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you* (John 13:15). One's convictions should always be carried over into one's conduct. That is obedience! Faith is not just a belief; it is a way of life. The writer of Hebrews states that faith is the foundation of all we hope for. But that is not all — it is also the proof of that unseen hope (Hebrews 11:1). What a person believes is always evident in his or her life and that evidence is a proof of the inner belief. How does your lifestyle reflect obedience to Christ and point to the hope which lives within you?

Paul further states that obedience should be in a spirit of thanksgiving. A Christian's obedient lifestyle should overflow with grateful service to God in a spirit of reverence and awe (see Hebrews 12:28).

2. In discernment - 2:8

In Colossians 1:13, Paul had reminded the Colossians that they had been delivered from darkness and transferred into the kingdom of light, the kingdom of God's own beloved Son. Now his concern is that they not be captivated and unwittingly carried away by philosophy, which is empty deceit, having its source in human tradition and its substance in the elementary principles of the world of darkness.

The word *philosophy* originally had a good meaning. Philosophy was the love of wisdom. However, by the first century, it had come to pertain to almost any speculation about God, the world, and life in general, including those of the occult and those based on human tradition. Philosophy also included religious sects. The historian Josephus describes the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes as three Jewish philosophical sects (Jewish Wars 2.8.2). These are the kinds of philosophy which Paul describes as empty deceit.

Philosophy is empty in contrast to Christ in whom the fullness of God dwells (Colossians 1:19 and 2:9). It is deceitful because it appears to be wise and good, but in the reality of practical application, it has no merit at all. It is human in origin (tradition of men) rather than according to Christ. Philosophy is rudimentary (*basic principles*) rather than complete wisdom and worldly (*of the world*) rather than divine. The Colossians knew the truth which is according to Christ. They were to walk in that truth and not be enticed by deceptive teachings.

Christians today also need to be discerning. Paul's words in Ephesians 4:14-15 are fitting and applicable: *We should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery*

of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but.....grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ.

C. Completeness Is Found Only in Christ - Colossians 2:9-15

This section of the letter is the heart of Paul's rebuttal of philosophy and empty deceit (Colossians 2:8). He gives a restatement of Christ's uniqueness and the believer's relationship to Him. He stresses that complete divinity is in Christ and that the Christian finds completeness in Him through His complete removal of sin, complete fulfillment of the law, and complete victory over evil.

1. He is full Deity - 2:9-10

Whereas the philosophies of men are empty, the fullness (again the Greek "pleroma," as in Colossians 1:19) of the Godhead dwells in Christ. The Greek word "theotes," translated Godhead or Deity, expresses the divine essence of Godhood, the personality of God. Paul is declaring that in the Son there dwells all the fullness of absolute Godhead; "they were no mere rays of Divine glory which gilded Him, lighting up His Person for a season and with splendor not His own; but He was, and is, absolute and perfect God" (Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, Vine, Unger, White). In Christ we witness the fullness of God in bodily form.

Christ's fullness makes the Christian complete, literally "made full." Christ's fullness brings us fullness because we are in Him. As a Christian, you are one with Christ, and all that He has done was done for you, specifically His work of salvation on the cross, His resurrection, and His victory over evil. Your place is in Him and with Him. See also John 1:16 and Ephesians 3:19.

Furthermore, as the fullness of the Godhead, Christ is also the head over all the angels (*principality and power*, Colossians 2:10). In Colossians 1:16, Paul had stated that angels (thrones, dominions, principalities, powers) were created by Him, through Him, and for Him. It would therefore follow that He is head over them.

2. He removed your sins - 2:11-13

The first aspect of the Christian's fullness in Christ is the complete removal of sin. This was accomplished by *a circumcision made without hands*, meaning it was not a physical circumcision but a spiritual circumcision (see Romans 2:28-29 and Philippians 3:3). Paul calls it the *circumcision of Christ*. It was not the circumcision of the patriarchs and Moses which was external and in which a small part of the physical flesh was cut away. Physical circumcision merely represented, illustrated, and foreshadowed the spiritual purification which

Christ would bring — a circumcision of the heart. The circumcision of Christ affects one's whole life because it involves the cutting away of the predisposition to sin. In Romans 6:6, Paul explained it this way: *Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.* In Galatians 5:24 he similarly stated, *Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires,* and in 2 Corinthians 5:17, *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

"For Christians, the physical rite of circumcision is unnecessary because we have already been circumcised with a circumcision made without hands." (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Colossians and Philemon, John MacArthur.)

It is through being *buried with Him in baptism* (Colossians 2:12) that a believer is circumcised in Christ. "Baptism is an evangelical word telling us that Christ has died and risen again in our place, so that we are dead and alive again in Him, with Him, and through Him" (Romans 6:4,11) (Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Walter A Elwell, Editor). At the time of salvation, every believer is spiritually united with Christ, being baptized into one body through the washing away of sin and personal renewal by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13 and Titus 3:5). This is accomplished by the power of God — the same power which raised Christ from the dead.

This transformation takes place when we are *dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh* (Colossians 2:13). *Dead in your trespasses* refers to spiritual death, the absence of eternal life. (The Colossians, to whom Paul wrote, were also physically uncircumcised because they were Gentiles. See Ephesians 2:11-12.) It is in this state of total separation from God that He intervenes and makes people alive together with Him. God is the one who activates and also accomplishes the salvation process. Dead people cannot make themselves alive! *God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved.* (Ephesians 2:4-5).

3. He perfectly fulfilled the law - 2:14

Christ removed all your sin by paying the full price the law demanded. *The handwriting of requirements* in verse 14 is literally "a bond standing against us" or a "certificate of debt" which acknowledges indebtedness. This is a clear reference to the Jewish ceremonial law with its ordinances, sacrifices, and religious observances. All of this was *wiped out* and *taken ... out of the way* by the death of Christ. The ceremonial institutions of the Old Testament were merely a *shadow of the good things*

to come, and not the very image of the things (Hebrews 10:1). For *the law made nothing perfect* (Hebrews 7:19). Christ, however, is a perfect high priest with a more excellent ministry. He brought a better hope, a better covenant established on better promises, and He Himself was the perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 7-10). The perfection of Christ and His ministry rendered the old system obsolete. "His death and resurrection had the same effect, in reference to those ordinances, as if they had been blotted from the statute book" (Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, Albert Barnes). See also Psalm 40:6-8; 51:16-17; Isaiah 53:7-11; Jeremiah 7:22-23; I Samuel 15:22.

4. He disarmed principalities and powers - 2:15

Paradoxically, it was also through the cross that Christ triumphed over satan and the demonic realm (also called rulers, principalities, and powers in John 12:31; 16:11 and Ephesians 6:12). Through the cross, satan was stripped of his power to effectually threaten and control those who are in Christ (Ephesians 1:19-22). *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage* (Hebrews 2:14-15).

This does not mean there will be no more struggles with satan in this life. In other letters, Paul speaks of the god of this age (satan) as having blinded the minds of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4). He warns believers to put on the full armor of God in order to *stand against the wiles (schemes) of the devil* (Ephesians 6:11-18). In the same manner, the apostle Peter admonishes believers to *be sober in spirit and be alert because our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour* (1 Peter 5:8). Satan's presence still affects us, but his power is broken. The good news is that our victory is in Christ because the evil of the world and satan are under His power. Satan's doom is sure. See 2 Corinthians 2:14 and Revelation 20:10.

Note: Some commentators take the *principalities* and *powers* in Colossians 2:15 to refer to the angelic hosts who were instrumental in giving the law (Deuteronomy 33:2; Acts 7:53; Hebrews 2:2). Some Jewish rabbinical schools attached great importance to these angels, and this may have been an influence in the false teaching of angel worship (Colossians 2:18). Christ's death on the cross annulled the ministry of those angels, presenting Him as the sole and supreme mediator and head over every principality and power (Colossians 2:10). Angel worship is unfounded futile.

II. Traditions of Men Are of No Value - Colossians 2: 16-23

Having solidly established the full sufficiency of Christ, Paul turns to confront specific errors which he saw threatening the Colossian believers.

A. Law Was a Shadow - Colossians 2:16-17

Believers have freedom in Christ and should not forfeit that freedom to legalistic rules which have no efficacy. The rules of the ceremonial law were a shadow of things to come. A shadow is an inferior, rough image which is cast by a real, substantial object. When one finds the real object, the shadow is no longer needed. Old Testament laws regarding food, drink, and festival observances were nothing but a shadow which was cast before the real substance, Jesus Christ. Those who have found Christ no longer need to follow the shadow. For further scriptural confirmation of this, see Mark 7:15-19; Acts 10:9-15; Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Corinthians 8:8; Hebrews 9:10.

B. Mysticism is Deceptive - Colossians 2:18-19

The Christian life can be compared to an athletic event. In 1 Corinthians 9:24, Paul calls his readers to run in such a way that you may obtain the prize, and to exercise self-control as those who compete. In Philippians 3:14 he speaks of pressing on toward the goal for the prize. In Acts 20:24, he expresses the desire to finish his course, and in 2 Timothy 4:7, he writes that he had fought the good fight and finished the course. The Colossians were running for the prize and winning. But they were in danger of being sidetracked and cheated out of their reward by following deceptive teachings which involved an outward show of humility, worship of angels, and visions. Those who practiced such things were puffed up by their own fleshly minds, not holding fast to Christ through whom *the body of the sins of the flesh* (Colossians 2:11) had been removed. The false teachers were relying upon their own actions rather than Christ alone to effect true spiritual growth from God.

Like the Colossians, you must beware that you do not cheat yourself out of your reward by replacing Christ with deceptive expressions of spiritual maturity. Overemphasis upon such things as tradition, spiritual disciplines, and legalism is motivated by false humility and results in spiritual pride. Christ is your judge (2 Timothy 4:1), the distributor of rewards (2 Timothy 4:8), and He is your goal (Hebrews 12:1-2). Keep your eyes on Him.

C. Decrees are Destined to Perish - Colossians 2:20-22

Because of the cross, the Christian has died with Christ to the old way of life, the way of the world (Galatians 6:14). Those who have died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, should no longer live as though they are in the world, submitting themselves to worldly commandments and doctrines of men. For the Colossians, this would refer specifically to Jewish ritualism and pagan philosophy. Paul says that the decrees of men are destined to perish. To submit to things which perish shows a commitment to the old way of life. (See 1 Corinthians 15:45-50.) The Christian submits to Christ, to an imperishable life (1 Corinthians 15:52, NASB).

Furthermore, the perishable, ceremonial laws of the Old Testament which contained prohibitions against touching, tasting, and handling certain things (Colossians 2:21) did not represent true spirituality. They merely prepared the way for true spirituality which is not an outward show of things, but an inner attitude and quality of life. As Paul has previously stated in Colossians 2:17, the ceremonial laws were only a shadow which pointed ahead to the coming of Christ.

D. Religiousness Has No Power Over the Flesh - Colossians 2:23

The practice of legalistic tradition, mysticism, and asceticism as Paul has described may have the appearance of wisdom, but in reality they are worthless and actually lead to their own sort of fleshly indulgence such as Paul has mentioned in verse 18, namely false humility and a puffed up, fleshly mind. Instead, Christians are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts (Romans 13:14). As A. W. Tozer has put it, "Magnify the Lord and mortify the flesh."

Applications

1. Have you put on Christ? How does your life reflect that you have done this?
2. What traditions, disciplines, or rules do you follow rather than trusting Christ to be sufficient?
3. Do you guard against the subtle influence of deceptive and unwise teachings by faithfully reading and studying the Bible?
4. As you run your race to win, do you have your eyes on the goal, the One who is your Judge, or are you often distracted by the judgments of other people?
5. Do you look to Christ for encouragement in your faith, or do you rely upon religious observance?
6. Where do you look to find happiness — to the material world around you or to Christ?