

COLOSSIANS
In Christ Is All We Need
Colossians 2:11-15

INTRODUCTION

In the film “Martin Luther” produced by the Lutheran Church, Luther, after he had been born again as a monk and enlightened by the Holy Spirit to understand the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, was seeking to share his new found faith with his Roman Catholic Bishop. He turned the Bishop to Romans 1:17 which says, “*The just shall live by faith,*” and Luther went on to explain how Christians do not need the relics of the church, or the traditions of men, or papal decrees, or meritorious works, or indulgences, or the mass or any of the other accouterments of the Roman Church. Bewildered by Luther’s sudden shift in religious perspective, the bishop looked up and said, “But, dear Martin, what will we put in the place of all these things? What will a man then have?” Luther looked him right in the eye and said, “Christ! All a man needs is Christ!”

This is the same message the Apostle Paul was communicating to the Colossian Christians - they needed only Christ. You remember that Paul is seeking to refute the Gnostic heresy which was invading the Church at Colosse. The heretics were saying that Christ alone was not sufficient to save a person. They were adding to the death of Christ, circumcision, the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law, and the worship of angels as conditions for salvation. They said a person must have Christ AND circumcision AND the worship of angels AND the ceremonial law to be saved.

Let us remember that Christ plus anything equals works. Ninety-nine percent grace and one percent works equals works. True salvation is all of grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

In Colossians 2:10, it says, “*And you have been given fullness in Christ*” or “You have been made complete in Christ.” All the Christian needs for salvation and Christian living is found in Christ. In Colossians 2:11-15: we are shown various ways in which we are full or complete in Christ. The key to this whole section is found in the words in Christ. The Christian is in spiritual, organic, mystical union with Christ and, therefore, has a position where he shares Christ’s blessings.

CIRCUMCISED IN CHRIST 2:11,12

Spiritual Circumcision: *In him you were also circumcised*, -- Paul is declaring that a Christian is spiritually circumcised because of his union and identification with Christ. The Jews in the Old Testament physically circumcised their male children as a sign of incorporation into the life and body of the covenant community Israel. It was a sign and a seal of the Covenant between Abraham and God and between Abraham’s descendants and God. It was a sign which separated Jews from the Gentile, pagan nations around them. However, having the sign and seal upon the body did not make a Jew an automatic believer in Messiah. Even in the Old Testament a Jew had to be circumcised in the heart to be saved.

“The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.” (Deut. 6:6). They had to believe in Jehovah God and the promised Messiah to come if they were to be truly saved. Now what Paul is telling these Gentiles who believed in Christ, the Messiah who has come, is that they are spiritually circumcised in the heart, even though they have never been physically circumcised. Christians, whether Jews or Gentiles are the true circumcision of God. ***“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh...”*** (Philip. 3:3). The New Testament is clear that the physical act of circumcision is no longer required as a sign and seal of the Covenant for the Church as it was for Israel.

Yet, these Gnostic heretics said it was required for Christians and that people were lost if they did not have this mark in the flesh.

Practical Circumcision: ***In the putting off of the sinful nature,***

This spiritual circumcision allowed the Christian to put off the sinful nature. The “sinful nature” really says “the body of flesh.” This may refer to the sinful nature itself or the assaults of evil which come through the body; that is, a Christian experiences a wonderful progressive emancipation from the clinging power of temptation which manifests itself through the body.

This probably means that the dominion and the authority of the old carnal nature in the Christian has been broken because of union with Christ. The flesh was rendered inoperative, neutralized; that is, the power and authority over the Christian has been broken so that we are no longer slaves to the sin nature as we were in our unsaved state. Theoretically, we do not have to obey the dictates of the sin nature but practically we do at times because it is such a powerful force in us. ***“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”*** (Rom. 6:6). ***“For sin shall not be your master (have dominion over you) because you are not under law, but under grace.”*** (Rom. 6:14). Positionally the authority of the sin nature is broken, but in a real and practical sense we still sin. By faith and the power of the Holy Spirit, we do not have to yield to the dictates of the sin nature, but we lack faith and at times yield. The sin nature fights a guerrilla warfare against us. Guerrillas usually have been ousted from authority in the government but they go on fighting, attacking here and there in us and when we least expect it. But we know the sin nature will not win the war. It may win a few battles but Christ will ultimately win the war in us because He died for our sin natures.

Christian Circumcision: ***Not with the circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ.***

This may mean that spiritual circumcision is performed by Christ for the Christian in a supernatural act at the moment of conversion. However, this may mean circumcision belonging to Christ.

If so, then it can be translated Christian circumcision. There is a Christian circumcision which is spiritual in nature that is distinguished from the physical circumcision belonging to Moses.

Spiritual Circumcision And Baptism: *Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him...*

The baptism mentioned here is not physical water baptism but spiritual baptism by the Holy Spirit. *“For we were all baptized by one spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”* (I Cor. 12:13). Water baptism does not bury us in Christ or raise us in Christ. If it did, we would have baptismal regeneration. This is obviously Spirit baptism.

Just a side note here. For Paul spiritual circumcision and spiritual baptism are synonymous. The outward sign of the covenant in the Old Testament was physical circumcision., but the Covenant was only valid to those who were spiritually circumcised in heart. In the New Covenant Church, water baptism is the outward sign and seal of the covenant which is made valid to those who truly believe. Certainly there is strong evidence that the sign of the Covenant is now water baptism and not physical circumcision. The obvious implication is that this sign of water baptism is to be placed on infants of believing parents and all pagan adults converted to Christ just as the sign of circumcision was placed on male children by believing parents in the Old Testament and all adult Gentiles who wanted to become Jewish proselytes.

Spiritual Circumcision And Faith: *Through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.*

This may mean that the Christian’s faith in Christ brought about the supernatural work of God in bringing about spiritual circumcision and spiritual baptism.

However, there is another, and I believe, the right translation of this phrase: “Through the faith which is the effect of the working of God, who raised him from the dead.” This tells us that the faith we exercised in Christ at conversion, bringing us spiritual circumcision and spiritual baptism was a gift from God. Faith is an act that man does but faith is created in us by God. *“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him...”* (Philip 1:29). Therefore, we can say, “We owe all of our salvation, even our faith, to the sovereign grace of God.”

This must have blown the Gnostic heretics right out of the tub because they wanted a works salvation and surely would have counted faith a work.

ALIVE IN CHRIST 2:13

Before Conversion - Dead: *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature,* -- Before conversion to Christ, these Gentile Colossian Christians were spiritually dead in their sins and dead people can’t respond. They were also dead in their

“uncircumcision” which looks at their whole pagan lifestyle which was antagonistic to God. Unsaved people are dead in sin, slaves to their sinful lifestyles and in rebellion to God. They are so dead that they cannot and will not respond to Christ. For them to be saved, God must intervene and perform a miracle.

After Conversion - Alive: ***God made you alive with Christ.*** -- God did supernaturally intervene, bringing conviction of sin, supernatural drawing, regeneration and faith to the wayward sinner. God miraculously made the Christian alive in Christ. The Christian shared the very life of Christ and this demands a changed lifestyle from pagan ways. A true Christian cannot habitually live as he did in his unsaved state. If he does, he was never saved nor did he share Christ’s life.

FORGIVEN IN CHRIST (2:14a): ***He forgave us all our sins,*** -- Because the Christian is in Christ, every sin he or she ever committed before conversion to Christ has been forgiven. No matter how big or small - all are forgiven. Guilt for sin was dealt with and now we can forgive ourselves and move on. Notice that Paul moves from “you” to “us” because unsaved Jews as well as Gentiles needed to be forgiven.

In New York in a certain graveyard, there is a tombstone. There is no name, no date, no epitaph, no symbols. There is just one word, “Forgiven!”

FREE IN CHRIST (2:14b)

Free From The Debt Of The Law: ***Having canceled the written code, with its regulations,*** -- The Gnostic heretics were appealing to the Mosaic Law as their basis for insisting Christians be circumcised and participate in the ceremonial aspects of the Law. What Paul wants the Colossians to understand is that they are free from the Mosaic Law in Christ, not from moral law but from the curse of the Law and all ceremonial regulations which are not applicable in the New Covenant. The “written code” is undoubtedly a reference to the Ten Commandments which is moral law and all the ceremonial law. In context, Paul is talking about ceremonial law in the act of circumcision but it goes deeper than ceremonial law to moral law. All men have transgressed the moral law of God; therefore, the Ten Commandments condemn the sins of men. Men cannot match up to the Law. It only shows that they are sinners. ***“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”*** (Rom. 3:19,20).

A “written code” in Roman culture was a hand written and signed note by a debtor acknowledging his indebtedness. It was an IOU. The Mosaic Law, the Ten Commandments in particular, put sinful men deeper and deeper in debt - you shall not covet, lie, steal, commit adultery, bear false witness, take the Lord’s name in vain. The Law piled up a vast list of debts to God which could not be paid. Unsaved men are in a hopeless and helpless bondage to sin, and such a debt who can pay? Christ must set a person free from the debt of the Law.

Free From The Threat Of The Law: ***That was against us and that stood opposed to us***, -- The Law of Moses was our accuser. The Ten Commandments threatened us with a curse. The moral law shouted judgment to us. It was against us and opposed us. Christ died to take away the threat of law against us.

Free Because Of The Cross: ***He took it away, nailing it to the cross***. -- The Ten Commandments and the whole Mosaic Law which put us in debt because of sin was nailed to the cross. Christ died to take away the threat, penalty and condemnation of the Law. The accusing side of the Law died when Christ died, but that does not mean that the Ten Commandments are not valid for us today as a rule of life but the Ten Commandments must be poured through the New Covenant. All the ceremonial aspects of the Law ended at Christ's death and all the penalties and curses of the Law ended as well for all who believe in Christ. The Law died in Christ. Christians are in Christ. Therefore the Law died to us as a threat, curse or penalty. This is what it means in Romans 6:14, ***"You are not under law but under grace."*** The Ten Commandments must be poured through the grace of the New Covenant.

The words "taken away" can also be translated "wiped away." Ancient documents were written on papyrus, made from bulrushes, or vellum, made of the skins of animals. Both were fairly expensive and could not be wasted. Ancient ink had no acid in it; it lay on the surface of the paper and did not, as modern ink usually does, bite into it. Sometimes a scribe, to save paper, used papyrus or vellum that had already been written upon. When he did that, he took a sponge and wiped the writing out. Because it was only on the surface of the paper, the ink could be wiped out as if it had never been. God, in His amazing mercy, banished the record of our sins so completely that it was as if it had never been; not a trace remained.

The words "nailed it to the cross" had great meaning in the Roman culture. According to Roman law, a man who was in debt was always in danger. The man to whom he owed the debt if he did not pay, could take him for a slave and he could take his family for slaves. It was a wonderful day when he got the debt paid. When he finally had the debt paid, then his family was free. He took that canceled debt and nailed it over the door of his house, so that every neighbor and every passerby would know that everybody in that house was free, there was nobody living there that was in danger of slavery. Why? The debt was paid.

Jesus did that for us. There were many things written against us. Who can number the sins of a human life? Jesus took it all and canceled it by His death on the cross, and everything that we did He nailed to the cross and wiped it out, and if we are behind the cross, we are free, just as those people were free who were inside that Roman house where the bill was nailed over the door. Every sin. Every debt. Every curse. Every threat has been nailed to the cross and Christians are free!

VICTORIOUS IN CHRIST 2:15

Christ Disarmed The Spirit World: ***And having disarmed the powers and authorities.*** -- In His death, Christ disarmed the spirit world. The ancient world believed in all kinds of angels and spirits and many of these evil spirits were out to ruin men through demon possession. These evil spirits were hostile to men. The Gnostic heretics also taught the worship of angels. They say that there were many good angels who were better mediators and higher mediators to God than Christ. Jesus Christ, Paul says, stripped them as a defeated army is stripped of weapons and armor.

Christ defeated the spirit world in His death. Because we are in Christ, we too can defeat the spirit world.

Christ Made A Spectacle Of The Spirit World: ***He made a spectacle of them,*** -- Christ in His death exposed the evil spirits to public disgrace. Satan, demons and all the forces of hell tried to keep Christ from going to the cross. But Christ went to die and in that death defeated all the forces of hell.

Christians need to be aware of Satanic and demonic activity but never cower in fear. Christ defeated them forever. The demons can harass and influence the Christian but they cannot possess the Christian. In Christ, we can defeat the enemy.

Christ Triumphed Over The Spirit World: ***Triumphed over them by the cross.*** -- The picture here is the triumph of a Roman general. When a general had won a great victory, he was allowed to march his victorious armies through the streets of Rome and behind him followed the kings, leaders and peoples he had vanquished. They were openly branded as his spoils. Christ as the great conqueror enjoyed a cosmic triumph and in his triumphal procession are the powers of evil beaten forever, for the whole world to see.

In Christ, we too have defeated the evil forces and we need not be afraid of them. When they taunt us, we need to claim Christ's victory over them for us.

CONCLUSION

What is the message of this section of scripture? In Christ, we are spiritually circumcised, spiritually baptized, alive, forgiven, free and victorious.

Recently I read the story about a man in his early life who lived a wild and sinful life; and one day in self-defense, he killed a man. The courts freed this man of any guilt, but he couldn't free himself from the guilt of taking a life of another human being. This drove him to seek Christ as his Savior and Lord, and he received God's forgiveness. But he still had a hard time believing he was forgiven. It also bothered him that the man he killed was not saved and he sent him into a Christless eternity. This whole thing wore on his mind.

Then one night he had a dream, and he dreamed he went to heaven and he wondered when he went there what the angels would say and what the Lord would say about this awful deed. To his amazement the angels had nothing to say but to welcome him, and when he was presented to the Lord, the Lord welcomed him, and he didn't understand why nobody brought up this whole matter of murder. He went to one of the angels and asked the angel about it. He said, "You know, down there in the earth, I murdered a man. It is strange that up here they don't say anything to me about it." The angel said, "I'll go find out why." So the angel brought a big book, and he turned over all the pages and he searched all the way through it. He came back to the man and said, "We have no record of that up here!"

There was no record of that act of killing because the Lord Jesus Christ died for that terrible sin. It was nailed to the cross.

Surely this section tells us that all our sins, all our debts, all of our rebellion was laid on Christ who was nailed to a cross. Sin is canceled! Sin is forgiven! Sin is taken away! Now we can sing:

"My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought;
My sin, not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross..."

It should be evident to us by now that "in Christ is all we need." We now can say as Martin Luther, "Christ! All a man needs is Christ!"