

COMPREHENDING OUR COMPLETENESS IN CHRIST – Part 1 (Colossian 2:11-12)

Please take your Bibles and turn to Colossians 2. Last Sunday, we looked at verses 8-10 where we see Paul warning the Colossian believers that they could be “spoiled”—meaning taken captive—by “hollow and deceptive philosophy.” What does hollow and deceptive philosophy consist of? **Three** things:

1) After—according to—the tradition of men. What is the **tradition of men**? According to **Jesus** in Mark 7, it is putting the **teachings of men** over the commandments of God!

2) After—according to—the rudiments of the world. What are the **rudiments of the world**? As stated last week, “rudiments” refers to the elementary principle of something—like the necessity of learning the letters of the alphabet in order to read and write.

Commentators debate the meaning of the “rudiments **of the world**,” but I believe—based on verse 20 (and Galatians 4:3 and 4:9)—that it refers to the world’s philosophy and teaching that in order to “**get right**”—and “**stay right**”—with God, you have to **keep a bunch** of rules!

3) The third thing that this hollow and deceptive philosophy **consists of** is that it is “not after”—**not according to—Christ**. In other words, **any teaching** that says Christ is not enough—that **someone** else or **something** else **needs to be added**—is a hollow and deceptive philosophy.

Why is Christ all we need? Because in vs 9, Paul declares Christ’s **divinity**—that **He is...has been...and always will be** God! **All the fulness** of deity dwells in Christ—meaning **Christ lacks nothing** that makes God, God! --And in vs 10, God through Paul states that we are **complete in Him**—meaning that—as believers—**we** lack nothing!

And that brings us to **verses 11-15**. For the sake of context, please follow along as I read vss 8-15. Once again, it seems Paul “strikes again” and gives us **deep...and rich...but somewhat difficult-to-understand—truths** about what Christ has done for us.

What I mean by that is that it is not always easy to see **how these verses relate to one another** and build upon one another. Rather than try to do that this morning, though, I’m going to come at it from a **different angle**. As I read over and studied these verses, it seems to me that God through Paul gives us **five pictures** to help us better **comprehend** the **completeness** we have in Christ.

As we get started on the text, I feel it necessary to give a **couple of disclaimers**.

Disclaimer 1) As already mentioned, there are **other ways to approach** this passage. For example, Greg Lundstedt (ETRadio.org) outlines it as follows: **Resist** false teachers (vs 8), **Rest in** the absolute sufficiency of Christ and what He has done (vss 9-11), and **Rejoice in** the results of our complete salvation (vss 13-15).

Disclaimer 2) Each verse could probably be a sermon in itself so there will be more that is left “**unsaid**” than what **is said**! And you’ll be happy to know that we are only going to look at **two of the five** this morning! Lastly, parents with children may need to elaborate on some of the things I’m leaving out—especially with this first one!

1. Spiritual surgery (vs 11)

Notice again what it says in verse 11: “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:”

A. The physical explanation of the picture

What is circumcision? Simply put, in the Bible it refers to the **removal of a piece of skin** from a baby boy’s private part when he was 8 days old—and I’ll leave it at that! God established it as a **sign of the covenant** between Himself and the Jewish nation, **starting with Abraham** as recorded in Genesis 17:9-14. You may or may not know this, but the baby Jesus was circumcised! **Luke 2:21** “And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, His name was called JESUS...”

Now that we understand a little about the **physical aspects** of the picture Paul uses, let's consider...

B. The spiritual explanation of the picture

What is the **spiritual meaning** behind this illustration—this picture—that Paul uses?

Simply this: circumcision—even in the Old Testament— isn't just about the cutting away of **physical flesh**—it also refers to the **removal of sin** from the **heart!**

Deuteronomy 10:16 "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of **your heart**, and **be no more stiffnecked.**"

Here we see that God **wants us to cut off**—to remove and get rid of—the **rebellion...**and the **sinfulness...** and **the stubbornness** that is in our hearts! But we **can't do that!** And—if we are **honest with ourselves**—we realize that the **nature** of our sinful nature is that **we don't want to get rid of sin** in our heart!

God, of course, **knows that**, so He steps in and says, 'I will do a **work in your heart** for you!'

We see that in **Deuteronomy 30:6** "And the Lord thy God **will circumcise thine heart**, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."

We have the same truth taught in **Ezekiel 36:25-27** "Then **will I** sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, **will I cleanse you**. A **new heart also will I give you**, and a **new spirit will I put within you**: and **I will take away** the stony heart out of your flesh, and **I will give you** an heart of flesh. And **I will put my spirit within you**, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."

Now... C. The spiritual application from the text

Look at vs 11 once again: "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands...."

--To be "circumcised with the circumcision made without hands" is an obvious reference to the **cutting away** of something in the **spiritual realm**—not the physical!

1) What is cut away—and removed—in the **spiritual** realm? "The body of the sins of the flesh...."

But a "body" usually refers to something **physical**! So what—in the **spiritual realm**—does Paul mean by "**the body** of the sins of the flesh?" I believe Paul is talking about our **sin nature**—also known as our "old man."

You're in chapter 2; look at what it says in **Colossians 3:9**. Here we see that our old man—with his deeds—is our **old way of living** that was controlled by **our old nature**.

Ephesians 4:24 "That ye put off concerning the former conversation **the old man**, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;"

2) How was our sin nature "cut away"—and removed? "...by the **circumcision** of Christ." But **what** does **that** mean? It certainly doesn't mean that **Christ's physical circumcision** as an 8-day-old baby boy "cut away" and "disposed of" **our sin nature!** I believe it refers to **Christ's crucifixion** for these two reasons.

a) Notice what it says in the beginning of **Colossians 1:22** "In the body of His flesh through death"—an obvious reference to Christ's death on the cross by crucifixion.

b) **Another reason** I believe it refers to Christ's **crucifixion** is because vs 12 refers to burial—and vs 13 points to the **resurrection**. And since a common "formula" (for lack of a better word), is the "death, burial, and resurrection" of Christ, it would make sense for vs 11 to refer to His death!

So we have the "**what**" that is cut away and disposed of—our sin nature—and we have the "**how**" it is cut away—by the crucifixion of Christ. But what about the "**when**"?

3) When is our sin nature cut away and disposed of? Notice again what it says in vs 11: "In whom also ye are"—**past tense**—"circumcised with the circumcision made without hands..." **Past tense** means it has already happened—not that **perhaps** it will happen or some day **in the future** it will happen. It has **already** happened!

It is also in the **passive voice** meaning it is something that has **happened to us**—not something that we **personally have done!** Paul makes a similar statement in **Rom 6:6** "Knowing this, that our **old man is [past tense] crucified with Him**, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."

So it is **based on** Christ's death on the cross for us 2000 plus years ago. But **when does** that take place—**for us**—as individuals? Does it happen automatically—to **everyone**—just because Jesus was crucified?

No! It is **only applied to us**—as individuals—when we **personally put our faith** and trust in Christ for forgiveness and salvation and become a child of God!

So the **spiritual explanation** of verse 11 is this: *Our sin nature is cut away and disposed of based on Christ's death for us when we put our faith and trust in Him and are born again!*

Some of you—hopefully **most** of you—are at this point thinking, ‘Wait a minute, Pastor! If my sin nature **was cut away and disposed of** when I put my faith and trust in Christ, **why do I battle with it** every single day?’ **Great question!**

And that brings us to... D. The practical application of the teaching

Notice again Romans 6:6 on your outline: Knowing this, that our old man is [past tense] crucified with Him, that the **body of sin might be destroyed**, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”

The practical application is this: **In position** our sin nature is counted as destroyed—but in **practice**, we are not to **serve it!** In other words, if we have been born again, **don't feed the dragon**, right? It has been **delivered the death blow** and no longer **has the power over us**—to rule us—that it once did!

--Romans 6:12 “**Let not sin therefore reign** in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.”

Simply put, **sin doesn't have to rule over us**; we **don't have to obey it!**

--Romans 6:13 “**Neither yield ye your members** as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but **yield yourselves unto God**, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.” Here Paul is once again saying that **we have a choice** of who rules over us—and who we are going **to yield to!** ‘Don't **yield your members**—meaning your individual body parts—as **instruments to sin!**’ We are **not powerless**; we do not have **to serve our sin nature** because God has rendered it powerless. It has been cut off—and cast away!

Picture 1? Spiritual surgery!

Picture 2? **2. Waterless baptism (vs 12)**

--We see that in vs 12 “Buried with Him in baptism...”

A. The physical explanation of the picture

What is baptism? It's having a little water **sprinkled on your head** when you are a clueless infant, right? **Obviously not!** I remember evangelist John Goetsch—in the fall of 1980 (yes; you heard right—45 years ago!)—saying, ‘If your dog dies, you don't take it out in the back yard, sprinkle a little dirt on it, and call it buried!’ And since baptism pictures **a burial**, it involves **going under the water!**

The clearest example of this is found when Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts chapter 8. Mark your spot here and let's turn there; I want you to see this for yourself in your own Bible. In the way of a quick background, a man is reading a portion of Isaiah and Philip asks him if he understands what he is reading (vs 30). Now vs 32. You probably have a cross reference in your Bible for Isaiah 53:7-8.

--Notice now vs 35. Do we have the **details** of what Philip said? No; we don't! But here's what we do know. The man is reading Isaiah 53:7-8—and Philip uses those verses to teach him about Jesus! And he undoubtedly explained to him Isaiah 53:6 “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the **Lord hath laid on Him** [Jesus] **the iniquity of us all.**”

--Now vs 36-37. For the sake of time, I can't elaborate on this, but I do want to point out one thing: Can an infant **ask questions** about the Bible...and want the Bible **explained** to them...and **understand the explanation**? Can an infant **believe with all their heart** that Jesus Christ is the **Son of God**—and **the Lamb of God**—that died for their sins? **No; they can't!**

--Now vs 38. Who went down into the water? Both of them! But if they were both in the water—and he (Philip) baptized him (the Ethiopian eunuch)—then one was **immersed under the water** while the other wasn't!

The physical picture, then, is being **buried under water** in baptism!

Next, let's consider... B. The spiritual explanation of the picture

Just like in the first picture where we saw there is a **physical** circumcision and a **spiritual** circumcision, there is a **physical baptism** in literal water—and a **spiritual baptism** that is waterless! Let's turn back to Colossians 2:12. Notice again what it says: "Buried with Him in baptism..."

Who's the "Him"? Jesus! **What's** the picture? We are **buried with Him** in baptism! **When** were we buried with Jesus? Notice once again it is **past tense**—buried—meaning it has **already happened**! And—once again—it is in the **passive voice** meaning it is something that **God did for us**—not that we did for ourselves!

So **when** did this happen? Were we **physically baptized** with Jesus by John the Baptist as a 30-year-old man like it says in Matthew 3:13-16? **No**! As already mentioned, it is a **waterless**—spiritual—baptism—meaning **burial**!

And once again, Romans 6 helps us understand the **spiritual** picture! **Romans 6:3-4a** "Know ye not, that so many of us as were **baptized into Jesus Christ** were baptized into His **death**? Therefore we are **buried with Him** by baptism into death..."

You're in Colossians 2; look at what Colossians 3:3 says "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." God counts you as having **died with Christ**—and He counts you as having been **buried with Christ**.

This happens **whether you understand** it or not! And it happens whether **you've been physically baptized** in water or not! God counts you as being **dead with Christ**—but also **alive with Christ**!

Galatians 2:20 "I am **crucified** [counted dead] with Christ: **nevertheless I live**; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Lastly, let's consider... C. The practical application of the teaching

What are we to do in light of the truth that God counts us as being "dead with Christ"? **Three** things:
1) Don't feed the dragon! Ever hear that before? Colossians 3:3 says we are dead—but Colossians 3:5 says "Mortify"—meaning **put to death**—the sinful things mentioned in the rest of the verse.

In other words, **don't cave in to**—don't be ruled by—your sinful nature. **In position** you are child of God; **in practice**, live like a child of God!

2) Live by the faith of the Son of God! We see that in Galatians 2:20! In faith, count on...depend on...rely upon...Christ's strength in you! Phil 4:13, right? "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me!"

3) Be thankful! Listen to some of the verses I've given you in the past about Paul's struggle with the sin nature that dwells within each of us.

--In Romans 7:19, we see the struggle: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."

--In Romans 7:20, we see Paul's statement regarding the sin nature within him: "Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."

Please notice that he is not **making excuses**—but he is not "beating himself up," either!

--In Romans 7:24, we see Paul's frustration with this body of death—this sinful nature—that constantly plagues him! "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

--But in **Romans 7:25**, we see Paul's **frustration** turning to **thankfulness**! "**I thank God** through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

What made Paul thankful? Was he thankful because he could serve God in **his mind**—but serve his selfish nature **with his body**? Not at all!

I believe it was this: Paul "got it"—he understood and believed—**that God counted Him dead** and buried with Christ! And since Paul **believed that God counted** him as dead and buried with Christ, Paul also **believed that when God looked** at Paul, he didn't see Paul's **sin** nature—he instead **saw the new nature** that God had implanted within him!

So rather than "beat himself up" over his sin nature, he **thanked God** that God **counted** that part of him as being dead! That's why the very next verse says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

God counts us as being dead with Christ—praise God! Are you believing—and rejoicing in—that truth?

What is it that God would have us do in light of what we've heard this morning?

1. First and foremost, are you ***in Christ?*** Every one of us—right now—is spiritually in one of two places:

--In Christ

--Or yet in your sins. There is no third option; there is no "in between."

Where are you? Has there been a time in your life when you recognized your need for Christ to save you from the eternal punishment of your sins—and called upon Him for salvation?

If you have doubts—or questions—about that, why not do what the Ethiopian eunuch did—ask someone to explain what the Bible says about it.

2. Second—if you are truly a believer—are you comprehending—and enjoying—your completeness in Christ?

Three kinds of believers:

1) Those who don't care that they're living in sin—and keep feeding the dragon! If that's the case, I can't help but wonder if they really are a believer.

2) Those that continually beat themselves up over their failures;

3) And those that say with Paul: "I thank God that He counts me as being dead with Christ!"