

2007-07-29 Colossians ch2 v11-15 (Ignite UK)

¹¹In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. Colossians 2:11-15 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION

- Let's take some time real quick to review where we have been the past few weeks and then we will have better perspective on where we are going tonight. One of the reasons why Paul wrote this epistle is what could be considered a preemptive strike. He is writing the church at Colossae to refute numerous false teachings that are being passed around in Colossae before they infected the church. The church at Colossae was comprised of both Jews and Gentiles and the Colossian Heresy contained elements from both cultures. It was a combination of Greek philosophy, or early Gnosticism, and Judaic Ritualism.
- Last week we looked at Paul's refutation of this Greek philosophy, Colossians 2:8-10, and noted:
 - The Deficiency of Worldly Philosophy

"See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ." (v. 8)
 - The Sufficiency of Christ

"For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority." (v.9-10)
- This week we are going to be looking at the second aspect of the Colossian Heresy, namely: The Deficiency of Judaic Ritualism and The Superiority of Christ

I. The Deficiency of Judaic Ritualism

A. Christ offers a Superior Purification

"In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead." (v.11-12)

1. Paul begins by informing his readers that they were circumcised in Christ, with a circumcision made without hands. Individuals promoting Judaic Ritualism would be sorely offended by Paul's language here. When you and I think of something handmade it has a positive

connotation, hand made products are generally more expensive. However, that is not what Paul intends here. In the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, the word “handmade” is used to describe idols, temples, and false gods. Paul is contrasting this physical handmade circumcision to the spiritual circumcision of Christ.

2. To better understand circumcision we need to turn to the Old Testament. In Genesis 17:10-14 we learn that circumcision is the sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham, and his descendants. The advocates of the Colossian Heresy were stressing circumcision as a requirement for salvation and thus attempting to force this ritual upon Gentile followers of Christ.

3. In doing so, they had missed the point of circumcision, because circumcision does not automatically place man in a right standing with God. In Romans 4:11-12 Paul says, ““He [meaning Abraham] received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.”

4. Furthermore Romans 2:25 states, “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.” Throughout the Old Testament there is mention of uncircumcised lips, circumcised and uncircumcised hearts, and even ears, because the stress is not upon a physical operation but a spiritual transformation.

5. Paul informs the Colossians that Christ has cut away their sinful nature, their carnality. There are several words Paul could have used to describe this action, but he chose to use an extremely rare word, ἀπέκδυσις, which stresses the completeness of the action as the entire body is put off; as opposed to putting off only certain members, which was the case in physical circumcision. Upon making this point it is clear that Christ does indeed offer a superior purification (so if you’re taking notes, that would be point number one).

6. Now Paul moves to clarify how this spiritual circumcision occurs. He explains that they have been buried and raised with Christ in baptism. Before going any further it is important to note that Paul is not instituting baptismal regeneration, the view that baptism saves you. That would stand contrary to all that Paul has said up to this point and make him just as much a ritualist as those he is refuting.

7. The key to understanding this concept is that Paul is speaking of baptism that occurs through faith and by faith. Paul is not speaking of the ambiguous, yet hopeful uncertainty, which modernity often associates with the word. Rather, he is speaking of an unshakable confidence in an object, because faith is placed in something. The object of the Colossians

faith, of Paul's faith, and of our faith is the God who raised Christ from the dead.

B. Christ offers a Superior Nature of Life

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” (v.13-14)

1. Continuing his refutation of Judaic Ritualism Paul specifically addresses his Gentile readers. He begins by reminding them of the distance between them and God. As Gentiles, they were both dead in their trespasses, their specific sins, and dead in the uncircumcision of their flesh; here Paul's emphasis is twofold stressing both their pervasive sinful nature and their position outside of the covenants of promise. If you are here tonight and you are not of Jewish descent then this is where you either stood or are now standing, your separation is twofold.
2. Despite this profound separation, God has taken initiative and made you alive with Christ. What is most interesting about this is that the phrase “God made alive together with” is contained within one Greek word. The stress is not merely upon the state of life but the union, the relationship, which is life. We find this profoundly illustrated in John 17:3, where Christ prays, “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”
3. How is this accomplished? How has God reconciled us who stood immeasurably separated from God?
4. We read that He has canceled the record of debt that opposed us as well as its legal demands. Debtors would usually write their own records of indebtedness. Here Paul uses the word χειρόγραφον which is a combination of two words “χειρ” meaning hand and “γραφή” meaning writing. So we have this handwritten record which actively opposes us. Paul also mentions the legal demands of this record. The word here is δόγμα, which is where we get the word dogmatic. A dogmatic position is one which you are unwilling to give up. The legal demands which Paul is describing are unwavering and fixed.
5. God has canceled this debt and these demands. Ancient scribes would write upon paper made of papyrus or vellum and unlike modern ink, ancient ink did not absorb into the paper but rather sat on top of the paper. As paper was expensive, scribes would often wipe this ink off and reuse the paper. That is what the word “canceling” means God has literally wiped our slate clean
6. Now we find an explanation of how this canceling occurs as God in His grace set them aside nailing it to the cross. As II Corinthians 5:21 states, “For our sake he made him [meaning Christ] who knew no sin sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (my

translation). Most of your Bibles will read “he made him who knew not sin to be sin,” but there is no verb of being in the Greek text so Christ literally became sin, “so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” and that is how our record of debt and its legal demands was canceled.

II. The Superiority of Christ

“He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” (v.15)

A. If you will look ahead to verse 16, where we will pickup next week, you will note that it begins with “therefore” as Paul will make application from the doctrine, which he previously laid fourth. Last week Paul concluded with the sufficiency of Christ and now he concludes with the superiority of Christ over all heretical systems.

B. The picture here is of a victorious Roman general who would have conquered peoples, and royalty disarmed, stripped of their royal garments, and then publicly paraded through the streets of Rome. The stress is upon the lack of restraint and fear with which these individuals were paraded. In Christ God has put to shame the wisdom and rulers of this world. As it is written:

CONCLUSION

²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. I Corinthians 1:20-25