

Colossians Chapter 2

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray together. Let us all pray. Truly, O Lord our God, you do deserve the praise of our hearts, our lives, our lips, for all our days of this life and all of eternity, because you are such a great and gracious God, and in the Lord Jesus Christ you have given to us such a beautiful Savior. Though when men looked upon him, they despised him, and they saw loveliness in him, yet, O Lord, for us the name of Jesus is the loveliest of all. And that person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, who took on our human nature and came into this world and suffered and died in our place and rose again, you are to us, Lord Jesus, the most lovely of all people. And our hearts thrill and rise up with a sense of delight and joy when we think of you, and that love, O Lord, by which you have drawn us to yourself and made us to be your children. Lord, we thank you again that as we gather this evening, we're gathering in the presence of the one who loves us with an everlasting love. We're not coming before one with whom we must quake and fear. We're not coming before you as the people of old did before

Mount Sinai because smoke and fire erupted and they were so scared. We still come before that same God, yes, who is holy and just, the one who has given that righteous law. But we come before him as those who know our sins forgiven. We come before you, O Lord, as those who know that every movement of your heart and every action of your hand is for our good, for our blessing, for our benefit. And, O Lord, we thank you that because you have revealed yourself to us in the Lord Jesus and we see in him such a saviour, such a gracious, such a tender one, O Lord, of whom the scriptures spoke who would not break a bruised reed or quench a smouldering flax, but, Lord, one who will work justice and righteousness in the earth. And, O Lord, we come. We come to you this evening because we want to, because you've put it in our hearts, that desire by your Holy Spirit to be here, because, Lord, we have that sense of hunger and thirsting, because we have that sense of need, because, O Lord, we desire you, because you are to us the greatest and most wonderful treasure in all the earth. The world can keep its multi-million pound lottery wins. The world can keep its celebrity status and its worship and adoration of idols.

Lord, we only want you, and you are our everything. You are our all. And, Lord, our desire is that this evening we may be lost in wonder, love, and praise as we consider who you are and what you have done for us. Move us, O Lord. Stir us, O Lord. Help us, O Lord, in this time to bring to you indeed worship which is fitting to you. Forgive us our sins. Fill us with your Holy Spirit. Help us in this time, for we ask these things as we bring to you all of our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen. Well, it would be very helpful, I think, to you if you did have Paul's letter to the Colossian Christians, Colossians open in your Bibles, because we're going to be looking at, as I said, several verses here this evening. That's the way that we've been working through this book, this letter of Paul's. We've been looking at his introductions and his prayer for God's people there. He's rejoicing in what God has done for them and in them, saving them and rescuing them.

And he's drawn their attention, particularly, of course, to Lord Jesus. He's exalted him for who he is. There in verses 15 of chapter 1 and following, recognizing that all is of Christ.

[4 : 3 9] It's his work. And that we need to keep our eyes fixed solely on him. And then he's gone on to talk about the struggles of the Christian life, his own, but also the struggles of living the Christian life. And he's begun to address the real problem of some false teachers who were infiltrating not only this church, but many other churches in that period. And we've seen again that they were people, verse 4 of chapter 2, who had fine-sounding arguments. They were people, as you saw last week, who had philosophies which were dependent upon you in tradition and so on.

But none of these things measured up to Christ. None of these things could be compared with Christ. And so we're going to continue from there. As I was thinking and preparing, I was reminded

of an illustration used by Rico Tice. He is an evangelist who is one of the founders of Christianity Explored and a very helpful evangelistic DVD series. And in one of his stories, one of his DVDs, he speaks about a man who kept two fighting dogs, a black fighting dog and a white fighting dog. And each week he would stage a dog fight between these two dogs. And each week he would win a lot of money by predicting and betting on which one of those two dogs would win. And he always got it right every single week.

And somebody then asked him his secret, how he managed to know exactly which dog would win and which dog would lose every week. And people bet on it and win. And he simply replied, the dog I want to lose, I don't feed that week. It's as simple as that. And Rico Tice used that illustration really to speak about there being two conflicting powers, as it were, present in every Christian. There is the Holy Spirit and there is the flesh, which the NIV translates in the phrase sinful nature. And in every Christian, there are these two opponents, like the white dog and a black dog, which are opposed and in conflict with one another. Paul gives a little example of that and explains that in his earlier letter, Galatians 5. And he writes this, so I say, live by the Spirit, that's the Holy Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the

Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that what you do not do, sorry, so that you do not do what you want. Now that's the Christian life. It is a battle that every Christian knows and experiences very well. On the one hand, the Holy Spirit who lives within us, when we become Christians, stirs us up to do the things that are pleasing to God. Holy Spirit moves us to pray, to serve, to witness, moves us to avoid those sinful things. But at one and the same time, the flesh, the sinful nature, which dwells within us, draws us towards those things which are opposed to God's will. It tempts us with thoughts, desires, thoughts, desires, which we know we shouldn't do. Now, if you know what I mean, and I hope you do, something of that battle, don't be discouraged. And certainly don't be self-condemning. Because every single Christian has that experience. Every single Christian goes through that battle on a regular occasion. And every Christian has. Even some of our great heroes of the faith, like Paul himself.

He openly speaks about it in his letter to the Roman Christians in chapter 7. He says this, verses 15 and following, I do not understand what I do. What I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate to do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, as it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that's in my flesh, sinful nature.

[9 : 08] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. So the struggle was in Paul, and that's a comfort to us, an encouragement to us. And the believers that are written to in this letter, these believers in Colossus, they were Christians as well, who struggled with this battle daily of living the Christian life in a sinful world, of battling between the Holy Spirit within them and that sinful flesh, that sinful nature. But then along came these teachers. These teachers, in one sense, who said, we've got the answer to all your problems. You know, we know how you can overcome these things. We know how you can live that life pleasing to God. We know how you can overcome the sinful nature in the flesh. Simply this, place yourself under the law, under the regulations of Judaism, and you'll never have a problem with sin again. That was something of their gist of their teaching. We have a little bit of it here spoken of at the end of chapter 2, where Paul makes mention of their teachings. Such regulations, indeed, have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, their harsh treatment of the body.

The problem was that though these teachers were very convincing, and though these teachers seemed to have all the answers to the Christians' problems, the problem was, as we saw last week, all of their teaching was hollow and empty and enslaving. It wasn't useful. It could do nothing to overcome the sinful nature, as we read there at the very end of the chapter. They lack, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. They don't work. They're like the sort of the quack that you see in old films. You've got the bottle, the cure-all medicine bottle. Drink this, and it'll cure you of warts, and it'll cure you of leprosy, and it'll cure you of everything else, and of course it doesn't work. And so these false teachers are just like that, holding up these rules and regulations, these laws, particularly as we saw last week, bringing people under the Old Testament Judaistic law and the Pharisaic type of laws. These things couldn't hold a candle to Christ, says Paul. For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you've been given fullness in Christ. The resources that these false teachers looked to and encouraged others to look to were human resources, frail,

sinful, broken. Rather, says Paul, look to Christ in whom all of God's fullness of power dwells. He is the one who is able. He is the one who lives in you. He is the one who empowers. He is the one who equips to live the Christian life, to go through the battle.

And to prove what he means by that, Paul goes on now to explain how Jesus has made it possible for Christians to live this life for God. And the chief point, and this is, if there's one thing I want you to grasp this evening, one point that I want you to take hold of this evening, it's simply this. This one point that Paul is making from now onwards. We are no longer living for the flesh, the sinful desire, because in Christ we've been set apart and raised to new life of righteousness.

That's the whole of Paul's teaching from here on, right until chapter 4 and verse 7. Everything's like that.

And you'll notice again and again, he'll speak about this, about the fact that we have had a new beginning. Particularly the key verse, in one sense, if you want to look at it, is chapter 3, verse 9.

[13:13] The second part of the verse, chapter 3, verse 9. Since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed.

That's the key. That's what he's talking about all the way through. And he's going to unpack that and explain that. And God willing, we're going to look at it bit by bit as well this week and then in a few more weeks' time.

And so, what do we get to? Where are we? Well, we're in verse 11 of chapter 2. So we've come to, we've seen that Christ, in Christ, who is the head and the power, the fullness of God, is all that we need.

And then Paul tackles one of the pillars of these false teachers' doctrines. One of their teachings was this, that you had to be circumcised in the flesh if you were to be acceptable to God and received into the church.

Now, we know that the Old Testament, God gave the commandment to his Old Testament people that if anybody was to be part of the people of God, they were to receive that sign of circumcision, the removal of the foreskin on a man.

[14:20] But these false teachers are now saying, well, if you're not a Jew and you want to be part of the church, you've got to have that operation as well. You've got to have that circumcision as well if you want to please God.

Because it's all part of the law bundle and package. But what they'd fail to understand, and what Paul points out is this, circumcision, physical circumcision, never made a person right with God. It was only an outward sign of what was needed on the inside. And so, in several places, God speaks about the circumcision of the heart inwardly.

Here he is, speaking through Jeremiah to his disobedient people. Jeremiah chapter 4 and verse 4. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord.

Circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem. He's calling them to do something inward. The outward was never what pleased God.

[15:23] God has never been concerned about the outward appearance. We have that wonderful story we teach the children, don't we, about how Samuel chooses the new king. Do you remember? And Samuel goes and he sees the sons of Jesse and they're all handsome and strong and everything else.

And God says to him, I look on the inside. Man looks on the outside. And so it is here. The cutting off of that piece of flesh, that foreskin, was only a symbol, only a sign, only a picture of separating oneself from the sinful nature and of living for God and for his glory.

That's why circumcision was God given as a sign of being in a covenant relationship with him. As a sign of, as it were, putting behind you the old life and living for God and being in a new relationship with him.

A relationship built upon promises of faithfulness and love. When a couple are married, they are carrying out a covenant. They are entering a covenant together because the two are leaving behind their family, starting new life together.

There's promises. And of course the sign of marriage we have in our culture is the giving and receiving of a ring. It's a sign and a picture of a promise within the heart, a commitment within the heart.

[16:47] The ring isn't what keeps the wedding together, it's the commitment of love and the promises made. Now, says Paul, these teachers want you to have this physical circumcision.

But, he says, in Christ you've already been circumcised with that spiritual circumcision of your heart. Notice how he puts it. In him you were also circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature, the flesh.

Not with the circumcision done by the hands of men, but with the circumcision done by Christ. The believer doesn't need the outward symbol because the believer has already received the inward circumcision by Christ.

And the symbol and the sign of this is no longer circumcision, but baptism. Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead.

Baptism signifies the same thing as circumcision. Dying to the old flesh and being alive for God. Verse 12. Raised with him through faith in the power of God.

[17:58] The spiritual act of circumcision and baptism takes place when we put our faith in God's saving power in Jesus. It's not when we are physically circumcised or physically baptized that we come into this newness of life.

But when by faith we come to Jesus Christ to save us. And so we see there is a very close connection between circumcision and baptism.

Circumcision being the Old Testament sign. Baptism being the New Testament sign. They mean the same thing. But the one has replaced the other.

And because they carry the same meaning, many believers, many Christians believe that they should be practiced in the same way. This isn't the position of everybody, but many Christians through the ages, most Christians through the ages, have seen that baptism, like circumcision, is to be given to the children of believers.

So that they might show the sign of God's covenant promise. Because neither circumcision nor baptism are connected to that time of salvation.

[19:10] We don't baptize a child or baptize an adult and say, by this baptism we're making you a Christian. We recognize that both for the adult and the child, baptizing them is in faith in God's promises.

That when they put their trust in Him as their Savior and Lord, then that wonderful sign becomes a reality in their lives. And they are made new with God.

Now whatever our belief or practice about baptism, we mustn't let it divide us from believers. Or like these false teachers, we mustn't allow our view to be imposed upon others as a law which binds them and their consciences.

But we need to see that it is the work of the heart that is essential. And so what Paul says in verses 11 to 12, in one sense he repeats again in another way in verse 13.

He speaks again about being dead in our sins, in the uncircumcision of our sinful nature, and being made alive with Christ. What's he getting at there?

[20:21] Well it's a well known truth that the New Testament teaches and that throughout the Bible teaches. That before we came to God, before our hearts were circumcised spiritually, we were dead to God.

We were ignorant of Him. We thought about this the other week when we looked at the raising of Lazarus from the dead on Sunday morning and about how that was a picture of what it means to become a Christian. That to be uncircumcised, to not have the work of God's Spirit in our hearts is to be spiritually dead.

That's why so many people don't know God and are ignorant of God when they say, I can't believe in God. The line has been cut off in one sense between them and God.

But the wonderful truth is this, that though we were like that once, dead because of our sins, God has made us alive. He's brought us into spiritual life, newness of life.

We were dead, now we are alive. A transformation has taken place. He has united us with Christ, who himself died and rose again, and in his resurrection power we share.

[21:36] That's why he says that for us there. God made you alive with Christ. It's not that we have a life of our own. It's not like as we thought that we somehow have been raised as Lazarus was raised to life, and therefore he had his own self-contained life.

But rather this life flows from our connection with Christ. This life flows from us being united and knit with him. Not of our own. Not of our own keeping.

Not of our own sustaining. But as he lives, so we also live. That's why Jesus said, didn't he, as he spoke to Mary before he raised Lazarus from the dead, I am the resurrection and the life. I am, personally. It's impersonal. That's why it's so important and necessary for us to have a very personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why it's so vital for us to have real living faith in him.

It cannot be a series of laws. It cannot be a series of theologies and doctrines and truths or practices or rites or whatever they may be. It must be me and him joined together spiritually so that his life flows into my life.

[22 : 52] Now, we may think, and certainly the Colossians and the false teachers then threw up a problem.

How can God give life to those that are dead in sin when their death in sin is the punishment their sins deserve? It's right that they're dead in sin.

It's right that they're separated from God. It's right that they're cut off from him because sin deserves and calls for punishment and death.

So how can God do this, make us alive? Sin that kills us has to be dealt with first of all. The sin that restricts us and that opposes us has to be dealt with first of all.

Look at these verses then. He forgave us all our sins. Second part of verse 13. Having cancelled the written code with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us.

[23 : 58] This is the law of God. The law of God is right and good and just and true. And we have broken God's law, his written code.

That keeps us therefore far from God. Here's what Paul writes as he writes to the Galatians and explains what the law says.

He says this, verse 10. So if you have not kept all of God's laws, every single one of them perfectly, then the law rightly says you are under a curse.

It opposes you and stands against you and keeps you from coming to God because God is holy and you are sinful. Because it has a great list of crimes against you and me.

So how can that be dealt with, says Paul? How can we be brought back to God when all the law, the written code, speaks against us and calls for our punishment and our separation?

[25 : 11] Well, says Paul, what we couldn't do, what our obedience to the law and outward living couldn't do, Christ has done in his death on the cross.

For he says this, he forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code with its regulations that was against us, that stood opposed to us.

He took it away, nailing it to the cross. Christ Jesus died bearing our curse, or as Paul puts it, he became a curse for us.

Here he writes again, Galatians, just a few verses after, he told us, cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law. He says this, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, cursed is everyone who's hung on the tree.

So in one sense, the very punishment that we deserve, the sin that we had committed and the condemnation that was upon us, Christ took upon himself when he went to the cross.

[26 : 20] And he said all the rules and regulations that the law calls for, the punishment it calls for, I will bear myself in the place of my people and all those who put their faith in me, so that they can be completely forgiven.

Completely forgiven. The punishment the law condemned us with, he took and nailed in his body to the cross. He suffered death in our place, so that we might be fully forgiven, and so that we might die to sin and live to God.

There's something else here, isn't there, that Paul picks up on. This is our final verse this evening, it's verse 15. There's something else which God has accomplished at the cross that reflects the fact that we now live a new life.

Verse 15, having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. How are we to understand this?

Well, although we were spiritually dead towards God when we were far from him, when we were breaking his commandments, the reality is this, we were and always have been spiritual people.

[27 : 40] We were dead towards God spiritually, but we were alive to those spiritual powers that are at work in this world. We were influenced, yes, even controlled by them.

Here's what Paul, again, writing to the Christians in Ephesus. He speaks about them being dead in their transgressions and sins, and then he goes on to say in verse 2, chapter 2, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature, following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of God's wrath.

As we thought last week, verse 8 of chapter 2 speaks about these basic principles, and when we looked at that word, if you remember, it teaches us and reminds us that there is a spiritual realm in this world.

Just as God is spirit and real, so there is a real devil, and there are real spiritual forces and powers. And the things that are going on in the world around about us, which men are carrying out, the atrocities and evil, are those things which are being people influenced and affected by those spiritual forces, and we were like that too.

[29 : 06] We were like that too, whether we realized it or not, and most people don't realize it, but they are being directed and guided and influenced away from things of God, towards the things that are evil, because there is a spiritual forces in this world.

And these false gods that men worship, these false and wicked spiritual forces, subject men and women to bondage, to fear.

Here's again, Paul writing to the Galatians, and he says this, So also, when we were, before we came to Christ, he's talking about, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.

Again, this same phrase, the basic spiritual forces of this world. So, their sphere of influence is our sinful nature.

Those spiritual forces affect the natural man, the flesh, the lusts of the flesh, those parts of our sinful nature which are contrary to God.

[30 : 15] And as long as we live for the flesh, then those spiritual forces will draw us away from God and draw us into sinful behavior. That's exactly what they try to do to the Christian as well, because though the sinful nature has been defeated in one sense, and dealt with, it's still present.

And we continue in that battle. However, says Paul, and this is the encouragement, this is the reality, this is the wonderful thing for us and for them, at the cross and by the cross, Christ disarmed Satan and his forces for the believer, because there he took our human nature to the cross and died in our place.

So we died at the cross with him. Just as our sins were placed upon him, so also our sinful nature was placed upon him, though he never had a sinful nature, but he was treated as a sinner.

So, when he died, we died too. That's one of the great truths that we speak of again and again.

Paul has a great list of things to say about this in Romans chapter 6, but here's just one of the verses.

For we know that our old self was crucified with Christ, so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.

[31 : 35] That's how Christ has disarmed the powers of Satan. They once held sway over our sinful nature, but our sinful nature has been put to death, and therefore they have not the same influence and power upon our sinful nature as they once had.

We've been saved out of the dominion of darkness. Remember Colossians 1 verse 13? For he's rescued us from the rule, the dominion of darkness, and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. We were once under their influence, once we were in their dark domain, once we were in their kingdom in one sense, imprisoned by them, but Christ has rescued and saved us out of them. In so doing, he's disarmed them. And so for us, the cross of Jesus Christ is not public disgrace and shame, though it was for him. For us, the cross is the public spectacle of his triumph, of his victory. What the world sees as a weak man, dying an inglorious death, we see as a glorious and wonderful victory that God has accomplished on our behalf.

setting us free, not only from the curse of sin, but also from the power of sin as well, that once enslaved us. So that now, in Christ, we do live a new life, a resurrection life, a life by which we can say no to sin, and yes to righteousness.

[33 : 02] And that's what we're going to explore as we go on. Living the new life, and how the things of the old life have been transformed and changed, so that as believers, we do not need, as the false teachers gave, laws and rules and regulations to overcome sin, but in the power of God, we live for Christ.

Close with these verses. They're chapter 3, and the first four verses. Since then, you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things, for you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. May God enable us, and equip us, to grasp these truths for ourselves, that we may live for him, in the week ahead.

May the God of peace, who through the blood, of the eternal covenant, brought back from the dead, our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good, for doing his will. [34 : 28] And may he work in us, what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory, forever and ever. Amen.