

Colossians 2:6-23

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[0 : 0 0] verse 6. Colossians chapter 2, reading from verse 6 to the end of the chapter. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world, rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head, over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised in the putting off the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men, but with a circumcision done by Christ, 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. When you were dead in your sins, and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us. He took it away, nailing it to the cross.

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. Since you died with Christ, to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belong to it, do you submit to its rules? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations, indeed, have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body. But they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

On the Sunday mornings that I was here in January and again last week, we've been looking at the general theme of how Christians grow, how they develop in their Christian lives, how they mature spiritually. Summing it all up, it was growing in grace. We started off by looking together of how the Lord Jesus Christ, who not only grew physically from that baby in Bethlehem, he not only grew mentally, as he learnt and absorbed, but he also grew spiritually, and his relationship with his father.

We saw part of that spiritual growth of Jesus was growing in the fear of God, for we saw that the fear of God was the beginning of wisdom, and so that as Christ grew in wisdom, it meant that he grew also in the fear of God. And we didn't see that in terms of some terror or worry about who God was, but it was a matter of reverence and fear of a holy, just God. Now last Sunday morning, we looked together at Psalms 42 and 43, and we looked at the whole subject of what it was to know God more. The more we know God, the more we know our Saviour, the Lord Jesus, the more we develop in our spiritual lives, the closer our walk with God. And we saw how the grace of God helped us in that, and that's really our subject this morning. My theme this morning, God willing, is finding grace in the cross. Finding grace in the cross. And my text is Galatians chapter 6 and verse 14, where Paul says, may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

[5 : 12] I hope that this will help us understand what it is to grow in grace, to mature in our spiritual lives. As a young Christian, I was often tempted as I read through the scriptures to think of those early churches, Galatia, Colossae, the Corinthian church, as perhaps being the ideal example for us to follow.

But yet, the reality is that when we start to read through these epistles, we find that although in many respects, they set down the blueprint, the example of how we should be living as individual Christians, how we should be working together as a church, virtually all of those churches had problems.

There were difficulties in those churches. And many of these epistles, parts of them, have been written to pick up on these, and Paul seeks to put them right. And there's almost a common theme about the problems. And the problems were always seemed to be linked with false teaching that came into the church. And in a way, the difficulties were similar. In each case, it seemed that what the people wanted was they wanted Christianity plus. They wanted Jesus Christ plus some other things. It seemed for some reason they weren't satisfied with just the scriptural teaching. They thought that something needed to be added to the gospel, added to the word of God, if they were to attain some spiritual growth.

And in each of the epistles, we find that the plus, the things that were added, were different in each case. But in every time, it involved the teaching that Christ himself was not enough. And Paul speaks out so strongly against that idea. The idea that if people were to advance spiritually, they would need something extra. And let me say, my friends, that that is exactly the problem we have today in many of our churches. We seem to be wanting to say, Christianity, Christ is not enough. We want something else. We need something else to attract people in, whether it's our music or our activities.

We need to add something to what we believe if we're going to really interact with the world in which we live. Many, we find, where Paul is speaking against, was the fact that they'd lost sight of what the grace of God is and what it does. And Paul saw that it was absolutely vital that they should come back, these, the early church, should come back to appreciate and enjoy the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[8 : 17] That, of course, is exactly the same message to us today. We're looking at spiritual growth. And such growth always involves an understanding and appreciating the grace of God.

Paul, I'll put it like this in 1 Corinthians and chapter 15 and verse 10, he writes, And that's our desire, isn't it? To know the grace of God working through our lives.

What is it then? What is grace? What is growing in grace? How do we receive it? Now, you know, the Corinthians, their add-on, their plus that they put them was over-emphasizing the gifts of the Spirit. They saw these as major speaking in tongues and all of that. They wanted to emphasize that rather than dealing with the fruit of the Spirit. That was the growth in the individual lives of the believers. And the Galatians, on the other hand, they insisted on adding circumcision. Effectively, you had to become a Jew before you could become a Christian.

And they seem to be doing that at the expense of ignoring God's grace, his free grace to his people. The Colossians, on the other hand, were adding all forms of rules and regulations. I read that passage a little while ago from chapter 2 in Colossians. They added rules and regulations to the Christian life and pushing young Christians as they were being converted into a life which was made up of legalistic principles. And Paul is saying really all those three churches needed to get back to the grace of God and its implications for their lives. And to do that, Paul takes them to the cross.

In that passage I read a few moments ago from Colossians chapter 2, we read in verse 13 and following, when you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us, he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

[10 : 51] And having disarmed the powers and authority, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. When we understand the cross, it is here we begin to grow in grace.

To the Corinthians, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 22, Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified.

A stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. Paul was driving them back to the cross. Driving back to the centrality of the cross in their lives, in their salvation, in their sanctification. The cross lies at the centre of the gospel and at the heart of everything else. Why? Because we find grace through the cross and we grow in grace as we understand its implications. So then our first point this morning is this, the cross, a means of grace. The cross, a means of grace. What do we understand by the cross?

Well of course, first of all, we understand it was an instrument of public execution. It's a wooden structure. We usually think of it as just a cross beams on which a man was hung with ropes and nails until he died. It was a Roman invention. It was a horrific means of execution.

It was slow. It was torturous, painful, agonizing. And as was typical with those who were crucified, Jesus was beaten and bruised and weakened before his crucifixion. We are starting the week of Easter.

[13 : 00] And as we come to Good Friday and contemplate on the crucifixion of Christ, we need to see something of these, how Christ was taken and beaten and bruised and scourged.

Those who witnessed the crucifixion were usually horrified. You can look for yourself in Luke 23. You find the people beat their breasts when they saw the horror of what was happening upon that cross.

The pain, the agony, the place of terror. But the cross was more than this. It was more than just a place of horror and terror.

How could Paul say that he boasts in the cross? The cross was not only a means of execution, but the New Testament reminds us that it is the very means of our salvation.

When Paul preached the cross, he preached that this was an instrument of death, but it was also an instrument of reconciliation.

[14 : 05] Reconciling God's people to himself through the death of Christ upon the cross. The death of Jesus was God's means to bring life to the world.

We think of the cross as a symbol of rejection because here Christ was seen in his ultimate rejection. The people rejected him. The Pharisees wanted him done away with.

But this symbol of rejection was in fact God's symbol of forgiveness to men and women. This was the cross in which Paul boasted.

So how do we, you and I if we're Christians here this morning, how do we find the grace of God in this cross? I've got three points here.

Firstly, the cross is a demonstration of the love of God. The demonstration of the love of God. That's probably the most famous verse in all of Scripture.

[15 : 15] John 3.16 reminds us that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

It's a verse that tells us the way in which God loved this world. God loved this world with an extreme. He loved this world such that his love is to be seen that he gave his only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, over to the death of the cross so that men and women who know and trust him might receive forgiveness, might receive eternal life.

The cross is the measure of the love of God. Many people wear it as a piece of jewelry. That's fine as long as we reflect upon the meaning of it.

I would suggest that first century, people would be horrified to see it being used as a piece of jewelry because it was a place of horror of death.

But the cross is the measure of the love of God. It is a symbol of the extent of God's love. For Paul, it was the very center of his preaching.

[16 : 38] In Galatians chapter 1, sorry, Galatians chapter 3, and in verse 1 we read, You foolish Galatians! Who's bewitched you?

Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. That's the heart of the gospel. Again and again in the writings to the Romans, we find Paul takes them to the cross.

In Romans chapter 5 and verse 6, You see, at just the right time when we were still powerless, Christ died. Who for?

Christ died for the ungodly. Verse 8 of chapter 5, But God demonstrates his own love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Or verse 10, For if when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life?

[17 : 39] The whole emphasis is that the love of God to this world, and to men and women like you and I, is to be seen in the cross of Calvary, and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The cross shows us the length that God's love was to go to, to win people like you and I back to himself, so that we might be reconciled.

It's a love that's so vast, we might even just for a moment, think that God's love for us, was even greater than God's own love for his son.

I mean that reverently. Such is the extent, and the depth, and the greatness, of the love of God. It's a love beyond measure. When we say God loves his people, it's not just an idle phrase.

It's something that comes with action, and determination. God loved his people so much, that he was determined to deal with their sins, and he was determined to bring them, into reconciliation with himself, and determined to bring him, bring them to eternity.

[18 : 52] The cross, a demonstration of the love of God. But there's another point here, and that's the cross was a demonstration, of the justice of God. And we can't separate the love of God, from the justice of God.

Sometimes we major so much on the love of God, we almost are guilty, of laying aside God's justice.

As if God no longer deals, with us as sinners. But that's what we are. If you're not a Christian here this morning, do you realize that before a holy God, you're a sinner, you've broken his law.

Why should God have anything to do with you, when you have rejected him, and you have broken his law? The gospel is not, that God lays aside his justice.

The gospel is not, that he ignores our sin, or forgets our sin, so that he can accept us. Many have this idea, well at the end, we'll all be alright, we'll all be in heaven.

[19 : 54] That's not what the scriptures say. There's a distortion of the truth, of what the Bible teaches. It wasn't that God in Christ, was reconciling men and women, by not counting their sins, but rather not counting their sins, against them.

It wasn't that he forgot their sins, or overlooked them, it was that he didn't count them, against them. In other words, God could not ignore sin, you know on Mount Sinai, God spoke, he gave the law, gave what we often call, the Ten Commandments, the moral law.

It's the royal, holy standard, by which he measures our lives. How we measure up, in our relationship with God, and our relationship, with one another, and our families, and our neighbours.

There God was telling us, what sin is. And that theme, is that in no way, can he, or will he, bypass that sin.

God is a just God, and he must deal justly, with our sin. And so there in Calvary, we see God, taking note of men's sin. It's here that he deals with them.

[21 : 10] It's here that he demonstrates, his perfect justice. Yes, God takes our sins, very, very seriously. There's no such thing, as a light sin.

All sin, all wrongdoing, all rejection, all disobedience, to God, is taken very seriously. And God takes account of them.

But he does not count them, against, his people. That's the ultimate wonder. That's the incredible truth, is that God, counts the sins, and trespasses, and the wrongdoings, of his people, not against them, but against his son, the Lord Jesus.

God did not, pass by sin. He didn't push it, under the carpet. He punished, sin to the full, in the person, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. Don't you remember, on the cross, Jesus cries out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? It was there, that he felt, the full force, of God's anger, and wrath, and punishment, against sin, poured out upon him.

[22 : 28] Not that he had, any sin of his own, for he was always perfect, but that he was, taking upon himself, the sins of people, like you and I. Jesus Christ, standing in the place, of sinners, bearing their guilt, sustaining their punishment, the divine judgment, falling on Jesus.

We read that passage, from Isaiah, earlier, this morning, a reminder, here we are, 750 years or so, before Christ even came.

We're told exactly, what was going to happen, just two verses again, verse 5, of Isaiah 53, but he, was pierced, for our transgressions.

This was the saviour, this was Christ. He was crushed, for our iniquities. The punishment, that brought us peace, was upon him, and by his wounds, we are healed.

We are all, like sheep gone astray. Each of us, has turned to his own way, and the Lord, that's God, the Father, has laid on him, that's the Son, the iniquity, of us all.

[23 : 48] So the cross, remember, we're looking to find grace, in the cross, but we need to understand, what that is. We've seen, the cross, as a demonstration, of the love of God, the cross, as a demonstration, of the justice of God, and now thirdly, here we see the cross, as the demonstration, of the wisdom of God.

This was the point, how can guilt, and forgiveness, appear together, in the presence of God, at the same time? We see that God, must be faithful, to his justice.

He must judge sin, or else he wouldn't be God. Yet at the same time, he is a faithful God, as we sang earlier, he is a faithful God, in his love, to his people, who he has forgiven, of their sins.

And the incredible wisdom, of God is seen, in the glory, of the cross. It's here, as we sang in that hymn, by Vernon Hyme, a few moments ago, that heaven's love, and justice meet.

The cross is the heart, of the gospel. It is this, that makes the gospel, such good news, for people like you and I. Christ has died, for us, he stood in our place, before God's, judgment seat.

[25 : 08] He's borne our sins. God did something, on that cross, that we can never, ever do for ourselves. And this cross, shows us, the love of God.

But that's only part, of the story. If we take that, on its own. We must see, the love of God, and the justice of God. It's then, we start to, when we think, about the justice of God, and the forgiveness, and reconciliation, that God has brought, we start to see, the great depth, of the love of God.

And God accepts us. The Lord God of heaven, accepting sinners, like you and I, yes he does, because, because, of Christ, for his sake.

And God persuades us, of his love, and of his acceptance. When I look at the cross, when I can think of the cross, as Paul expounds it, in the scriptures, I can say, the son of God, loved me, and gave himself, for me.

Can you say that, this morning? Is that your testimony, that the God, the son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, loved me, and gave himself, for me.

[26 : 31] If you want to know, that love, well then we are called, to come, to this saviour. When I begin, to understand, you see, some of the things, of what God has done, for me, and how he's dealt, with my sin, I start to understand, how he has brought, me blessing.

For example, we read in Romans 8, and chapter 32, he who did not, spare his own son, but gave him up, for us all, how will he not, also along with him, graciously, give us all things?

If we believe, that our sins, have been dealt with, on the cross of Christ, Christ, how can we, add anything, to what God has done?

Are you a Christian, this morning? If you're not, a Christian, let me just take a moment, to remind you, that the Lord Jesus Christ, invites you, to come to him.

He does deal, with your sin. Yes, you're, unable to come, of yourself, because, your own will, is distorted, by sin, and you need, Christ, to work in your heart, you need the Holy Spirit, to move your heart, to receive, and to cry out, for Christ.

[27 : 54] But let me say, to you this morning, if you cry out, for forgiveness, with all sincerity, to the Lord, Jesus Christ, he is faithful, he will, fulfill, all that he's promised.

He will grant you, forgiveness. And if you're a believer, here this morning, do you truly believe, that God loves you, in this way?

And that the cross, is the extent of that love? Satan is always there, to cast doubts, in our minds.

But when we look, to the cross, we find that, final persuasion, that God, is gracious, towards his people. How can he fail, to care for us, if he's given his son, for us?

How can we doubt him, when he's given, such evidence, of his love? If we lack assurance, of his grace, it is because, we fail to focus, on the spot, where it can be found.

[29 : 03] And that is the place, for our growth, in grace. And this we need, to understand, we welcome God's grace, in salvation.

But we must look, to see its implications, and what it brings, to us, in our Christian life. In a way, that's an introduction, to our subject, this morning.

But my second part, is much shorter. Because unless, we have a real, grasp of the cross, and God's love, seen, in the offering, of Christ, in our place, we will never, grasp what it means, to grow, in grace, and in love, towards God.

Our text is, may I never boast, except, in the cross, of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which, the world, has been crucified, to me, and I, to the world.

Which brings us, to our second May point, this morning. The cross, and its implication, for our lives. Because the cross, has implications, for the way, the Christian lives.

[30 : 22] The cross, is not just, some event, which happened, 2000 or so, years ago, and that's the end of it. We, we sort of, plug into it, and that's the end of it. It is something, which is real, that is vital.

It is the very means, by which we grow in grace, day by day. And Paul, has two points here, at the end of that, verse 14, of Galatians 6. He says, the world, is crucified, to the Christian.

The world, is crucified, to the Christian. What do we mean by this? Well, first of all, the world, is that which surrounds us. It's all that, which is separate, from God.

The world, impinges upon us, at every point. We come here, on a Sunday morning, and a Sunday evening, and this is a little, oasis, away from the world.

It's a foretaste, of heaven. And we enjoy, one another's fellowship, as we think upon, the things of God. But come tomorrow morning, we're back, very much in the world, aren't we?

[31 : 21] In our schools, in our offices, in our workplaces, amongst our neighbours, in the supermarkets. And worldly things, impinge upon us, at every point.

That world, is separate from God. It's the age, in which we live. It's an age, that is dominated, by sin. People do not, like to hear, about the holiness, of God.

They do not, like to hear, about the righteousness, of God. They do not, like to know, that so much, of their lives, is dominated, by sin.

And this world, is a place, that is full, of temptations. We're dragged, away, aren't we? Others, seem to, offer so often, even to the Christian, those things, which seem attractive, that would take us, away from God.

And the Bible, tells us, how the Christian, is to deal, with the influence, of the world, upon our lives. And quite simply, Paul says, it's to be crucified.

[32 : 29] It's to be crucified. In other words, the influence, of the world, upon our lives, is to receive, the same treatment, at the hands, of the Christian, as Jesus received, at the hands of men.

That's something, so stark, isn't it? Crucifixion, such an unnatural death, such horrible, things, but it was something, that was deliberate, and brutal.

It's not something, that could be, self-inflicted. The world, doesn't go away, on its own. And if we're Christians, here this morning, if we're seeking, to live a Christian life, then we have to deal, with the influence, of the world, upon our lives.

And some of the things, stick to us, a bit like a limp, it does, doesn't it? Seeking to weaken, our spirituality. And we must deal, with the influence, of the world, on our Christian lives.

Jesus spoke, of this clearly, as he, gave us the, sermon on the mount. We read in chapter 5, of Matthew, verse 29.

[33 : 43] Very dramatic. It says, if your right eye, causes you to sin, gouge it out, and throw it away. It's better for you, to lose one part, of your body, than for your whole body, to be thrown into hell.

And if your right hand, causes you to sin, cut it off, and throw it away. It is better for you, to lose one part, of your body, than for your whole body, to go into hell. Now obviously, Jesus is not saying, that we're to go, into self-mutilation.

But what he is saying, is that we have to deal, radically, with the sin, that is in our hearts, and lives, as Christians. The message is real. Welcoming God's grace, into our hearts, implies, rejecting the world.

Living for Christ, means nothing less. The practicalities, of living the Christian life, always means, going back to the principles, that Jesus taught.

Do you remember, the parable of the sower? The sower and the seed. There was a thorny soil, that received the seed. And how did Jesus put it? It was only possible, for you to grow up, to a certain point.

[34 : 50] And then, all the weeds, and the thorns, crowded in upon your life. And then your own faithfulness, of course, begins to cease.

Because no weeding, has been done in your heart. Growing in grace, developing in the Christian life, will always be limited, will always be limited, if we only ever think, of building up, the positive aspects, of Christian character.

Now they're very important. We are to grow, in the fruit of the spirit, as we read in, reading Galatians 5, 22 and 23. But unless we deal, radically, with the issues, of indwelling sin, in our lives, then our growth, will always be inhibited.

I don't know, what that indwelling sin, might be in your life. I know what it is in my life, and I know I struggle, to deal with it. Ask any gardener, plants, will never grow well, if they're surrounded, by weeds.

If you want to know, the truth of what I'm saying, just go and look in your garden. That should remind you, every day, that we need to deal, with these things. Jesus emphasizes to us, that if we do nothing, in this area, of spiritual life, we provide the very conditions, for worldliness, to come in, and to cut back, our growth, in grace.

[36 : 20] Paul wrote, to Titus, and we read in chapter 2, verse 11, for the grace of God, that brings salvation, has appeared to all men, it teaches us to say, no, to ungodliness, and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives, in this present age, while we wait, for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing, of our great God, and saviour, Jesus Christ.

In other words, the grace of God, as we contemplate the cross, teaches us to say, no, to ungodliness. Every sin, we commit now, as a Christian, is a further, sin, that Christ, dealt with, there, on the cross.

Here's the balance, the grace of God, teaches us to say, no. Are we doing that? Seeking to say, no, to the influence, of the world, in our lives.

And then secondly, and finally, this morning, Paul says, not only, are we, to see, that the world, is crucified, to the Christian, but the Christian, is crucified, to the world.

Let me read that text again. May I never boast, except, in the cross, of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world, has been crucified, to me, and I, to the world.

[37 : 50] Here's perhaps, sometimes we draw back. Yes, we understand the need, to deny ourselves, but we are told, that following, Christ, we are likely, to be rejected, by others.

We don't like, rejection. Christ, was a man of sorrows, rejected, despised, as we read, in Isaiah 53. John, in his epistles, tells us, in this world, we are like him.

We are called, to share in his suffering. In Colossians, chapter 1, and in verse 24, we read, now I rejoice, and what was suffered, for you, and I fill up, in my flesh, what is lacking, in regard, to Christ's affliction, for the sake, of his body, that is the church.

Paul reminds us, that leading, the Christian life, if we lead, holy lives, then we will be rejected. There will be those, who will despise us. There will be those, who will condemn us, and look down upon us.

If we grow in grace, we grow to be like Christ. And Christ, the one we love, and the one we serve, is the crucified, Savior.

[39 : 11] To follow him, means taking up our cross, and denying ourselves. This can have effects, upon our relationships, in our families, with our neighbors, in our workplace.

Growing in grace, can mean, sometimes rejection, misunderstanding, even hatred, by the world. Some, of course, have been called, to pay, the ultimate price, for their walk, with Christ.

But we look to the cross. We look to the cross, the cross of our salvation, where Christ's death, means, our forgiveness. We look to the cross, in our daily lives.

It's there, we receive hope, it's here, we receive, encouragement, to develop, our Christian lives, and to live lives, of godly holiness.

It means, it means, dealing, daily, with the temptations, of the world, that can so easily, overcome us. And as Jesus says, we're to take up our cross, and to follow him.

[40 : 26] Only then, do we start to feel, the full benefits, of the grace of God, in our lives, as we contemplate the cross. As we see the grace of God, in his love, and justice, and wisdom, as we see that grace, it gives us the strength, we need, to crucify the world, to put the sins, of the world, away from us, and to live holy lives, and to live lives, which sometimes, may be hard, but we rejoice, that we have a saviour, who takes us through, to be with him, for all eternity.

May we never tire, of looking at that cross, of Christ, and trusting, in that grace of God, that gives us blessings, for every day, for Christ's sake.

Amen.