



Christ, not Captivity

Colossians 2:8-17

I. WARNING: Don't Return to Captivity!

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.

Colossians is written because of a concern about a potential Colossian captivity

- Gnosticism – hidden knowledge--A spiritual fullness unattainable without the hidden knowledge
- Fascination with the spiritual realm and angels as intermediaries (15, 18)
- Asceticism (21-23)
- OT Ritualism – circumcision (11) and Jewish calendar/feasts (16-17)

Paul says that this body of false teachings is as based on

“philosophy”

- Paul is not condemning all philosophy
- “Philosophy” here is more like “worldview” or “approach to knowledge.” I think Paul would have said that there are good philosophies and bad philosophies. Here he’s obviously talking about the bad.
 - This false teaching in and around Colossae is *merely* based on philosophy. In fact, the rest of what he says (v 8) helps us see that even more. →

“empty deceit”

- These false teachers were likely pretty cunning and clever
- 2:4 – They tried to “*delude with plausible arguments*”
- 2:23 – Their arguments have “*the appearance of wisdom*”
- Good salesmen, but it’s all empty. It’s all deception.

“human tradition”

- v 22 – “*acc to human precepts and teaching*”
- It was not based on the normal means of divine revelation (2 Pet 1:21 – “*not of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit who spoke for God*”).
- It was made up, passed around.
- It was a different model than the “noble Bereans” in Acts 17 – who “*searched the Scriptures daily to see if the things they were taught were true.*”
- If you asked the false teachers around Colossae for chapter & verse, they probably would have sneered...or they would have pointed to a Vs here and a Vs there taken out of context. It may have a Bible Vs here or there, but really it’s a system based more on human tradition than the biblical tradition.

"elementary spirits"

- Earthly spirits. The teaching is, at root, demonic.
- ...perhaps because it wrongly seeks to tap into the spiritual realm (2:18)

II. WHY: What's the Alternative? (the much better alternative to this popular false teaching in Colossae)

A. In Christ, there is Fullness (9-10)

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.

The false teaching offered a new spiritual fullness.
But the Colossian believers already had this fullness in Christ.
Not Christ + _____.

Notice the progression (9-10)...

- Christ has the fullness of deity in him. He is God. He is the "head and rule" of everything.
- You have Christ. You are "in Him." And now you're filled with his Spirit.
- So you already have the fullness of God. It's in Christ. That's where "the fullness of deity dwells."

Lit: "you have come to the fullness of life in Him"

Now and not yet

- You have the fullness of God already.
- We're already in "seated in the heavenlies" (Eph 1)
- Yet Paul can say elsewhere, *we look now thru a dark glass - one day we will see him face to face.*
- In Colossians he's emphasizing what's now rather than what's not yet because it's an antidote to the Colossian false teaching.

B. In Christ, there is True Circumcision (11)

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,

- Circumcision - a **long history** beginning with Gen 17 when God gave it to **Abraham** as a covenant of promise --*a symbolic rite to picture the removal of the flesh/sin*
- Remember, the OT had a very physical orientation to its worship and law

- Most of that physical, outward worship was meant to picture / anticipate a spiritual, inner reality that was to be fulfilled in the future. The same is true with circumcision...
- Spiritual circumcision is what's really needed; physical circumcision is just a *picture* of a heart-problem

Deuteronomy 30:6 *Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, that you may live.*

Jeremiah 4:4 *Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the foreskins of your heart...*

Romans 2:28-29 *For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit...*

Phil 3:3 *We are the true circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.*

- Paul says to the Colossian's (11), you have been circumcised with a circumcision done "not with hands"
- The contrast between physical and spiritual circumcision is so clear; it's such a powerful word picture...
 - The foreskin is not the source of sin and rebellion
 - Physical circumcision never fixed anybody
 - We don't need a circumcision of the tip, but of the heart
- We need God to do spiritual surgery on our hearts
 - To write the law on our hearts
 - To give us desires for him and his ways
- The Law could not do that. The law is good in that it shows us sin and judgment; it demonstrates to us that there is a problem, and we can't fix that problem on our own, or in our own strength, but in the Gospel we not only have forgiveness, we have new desires, new ability.

John Bunyan

*Run, John, run, the law commands,
But gives you neither feet nor hands.
Far better news the gospel brings;
It bids you fly and gives you wings.*

C. *In Christ, there is Resurrection (12-13a)*

...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. 13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him,...

A New Testament word picture – Baptism

- Identification with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection as our only hope--the centerpiece of salvation.
- A symbol of our spiritual resurrection... new birth, new creation, death to the old and a resurrection of the new
- You have been set free from *blindness, deadness, spiritual inability,*

Now and not yet

- There is a resurrection to come, and we will be like him and be with him.
- But we have that in principle now. *We have a spiritual resurrection already.* We share in his resurrection already. And that's one reason we can be sure about another further resurrection to come when Christ returns.
- You are alive! By virtue of union with his resurrection, you have been made alive...and never have you been more alive. To "feel alive" you don't need a *vacation, sky diving, great love-making, expensive food, the world's most fulfilling job* (whatever!) We have been made alive already in Christ.

^{ESV} **John 10:10** The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. ***I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.***

D. *In Christ, there is Debt-Forgiveness (13b-14)*

...having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Another word picture of what Christ and his death and resurrection means for those who believe and follow...

"A record of debts stands against us" – debts = sin / a record / against us
There are "legal demands" attached to this "record of debt" = **death** (spiritual / physical / eternal)

Some options:

- Try to work it down the debt by being good?
- Try to debate it, justify it with the Judge?
- Try to ignore that it's there and that there's a payment to come?

In Christ, this *certificate of debt* and its *legal demands* have been "set aside".
"He nailed this record of debt to the cross" (14)

Now, of course, this is a word picture. There wasn't any certificate, a piece of paper, nailed to the cross. Only Jesus, his body, was nailed to the cross. He embodied the debt. He took its legal demands (death) upon himself. Far better

than a certificate being nailed to the cross or thrown away or set aside (a certificate only signifies something of reality, like a diploma signifies adequate grades and enough credits), Christ, in the flesh, was our human certificate.

Do you want to know that you're free?

- Look to the cross and see the debt paid. Believe that in love he came to “seek and save that which was lost”, to “reconcile us to God through his blood.” That’s already done. He said “it is finished” as he breathed his last. And he rose victoriously on the 3rd day to confirm that what he says is true and what he came to do worked. His death worked. The substitute sacrifice has been accepted by God. We simply believe that that’s so and receive it as a gift.
- This means that really bad sinners can come to him. They are welcomed by him
- This encourages assurance to be more rooted in Him and his work, than in ourselves, our work, our performance, our faith, or our feelings.
- Most of us operate like this: ‘God’s grace gets me in, but my assurance about being in is basically based on me and my fruit.’ That’s not totally untrue, and that’s often something we need to talk about and remind ourselves of (see 1 John). But there’s another angle to assurance – one more hopeful, one more Christ-centered, less about me and how I’m doing.
- So many places in the Bible encourage assurance simply because...
 - Christ died,
 - or because his love is unchanging,
 - or because his promises won’t fail,
 - or because it’s all his work from start to finish, etc.

E. *In Christ, there is Triumph...Already (15)*

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him...

In ancient battles there was no TV coverage to let the people back home know how it was going. Rumors spread throughout the city about this or that. But they didn’t really know anything definitive until the army came home. If the army had won they would immediately march through the city displaying the spoils they had taken from the defeated army. Their helmets, their armor, their shields, their heads, prisoners in tow at the end, maybe their flag torn in two – all prominently displayed as symbols of their triumph. ***That’s the picture that Paul paints about Christ’s victory over Satan and his army.***

Christ has stripped them of their armor, he has triumphed over them, and laid them to shame; they’ve been stripped of their weapons.

Now when did Christ do this? When was his victory won? How and when did he “disarm” them and “triumph over them”? Believe it or not, *at the Cross*

What amazing irony! Christ was stripped of his clothes, he was mocked and beaten, tied up, spit upon (much like a prisoner of war in Ancient times); he was seemingly defeated. And this was his victory! This word “disarmed” (15) can be translated either *disarmed* or *disrobed* – possibly a play on words: Christ was disrobed, but in the process he was disarming his enemies.

So we will not fear them. as Martin Luther taught us to sing:

*And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.*

*That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
The body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.*

Now and not yet

- On the one hand, Scripture says that *Satan is roaring lion seeking to devour* (1 Pet 5:8)
- But here it says he’s a weaponless general. How comical! He’s a toothless lion.
- Both are true. Both truths are needed for different times.
 - There is a time to be sober about our adversary who’s real and not yet utterly conquered (defeated in principle / it’s as good as done).
 - And there’s a time to *laugh* and *eat* and *drink* and *love* and *sleep well* precisely because the victory has been won. Christ has done it. Nothing and no one can *separate us from his love*.

F. In Christ, there is Fulfillment of O.T. Shadows (16-17)

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

- After Christmas and new Years we’ll come back to these verses to look at them more carefully.
- For today I only want to show you that they’re connected to this whole train of thought...beginning with the warning in v 8.

- His point in Vss 16-17 is: Don't be held captive by a return to the OT law.
- "No one can pass judgment" on you re: OT food laws and OT feasts and OT holy days
 - These had their place, they had their time
 - They were a shadow of what's to come - Christ is the substance.
 - Just like circumcision which pointed to a greater sp reality in Christ.
 - 'Colossian's, you already have the substance - you have Christ.'
 - It's not "Christ + a return to the OT menu or OT calendar"
 - "Fullness" isn't had here. You have fullness directly from Christ and only in Christ.
 - Defeat of our sin isn't had in these.
 - Conquering Satan doesn't happen by going back.
 - You're not "united to Christ" by trying to be a little Jewish.

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Colossians 2:8-17

Discussion 1: Imperatives and Indicatives

- *Quick review of what they are*
- **Read 2:1-2:18 --- How does Paul integrate them?**

[Foundational truths leading to how we ought to believe, behave, and respond.

- v.1-5 ind.
- v.6-8 imp.
- v9-15 ind.
- v16-19 imp.

Remember “*therefore*” is an indicator that an imperative is coming that is related to the previous indicatives “oughts” (as in you “ought” to do or believe) following or sandwiched between God’s revealed truths/sound doctrine.)]

- *How are this week’s text imperatives (v. 8ff, 16ff) related to the previous verses?*

[It’s important to recognize that we are starting part way through an imperative that began in verse 6 (with a “therefore”). You can think of v8 and v16 as explaining/expanding on what it means to “walk in him.”]

Discussion 2: “In Christ--Avoiding Captivity (and Judgment)”

- *Review the “in Christ” indicatives. How are these truths helpful in keeping us alert to potential captivity? How can they give us solid ground to stand upon when we reject unjust judgments of others?*

[I’ve listed various potential “captivities” below to give you some ideas of the kinds of captivities that these truths can protect us from.]

- *In Christ, there is Fullness (9-10)*

[*Captivity*: You need Christ and _____ (our organization, our apostolic succession ...) to truly have access to God]

- *In Christ, there is True Circumcision (11)*

[*Captivity*: You need Christ and _____ (our standards of holiness, our religious observances ...) to subjugate the flesh to the Spirit]

- ***In Christ, there is Resurrection (12-13a)***

[*Captivity*: You need Christ and _____ (“your best life now” ...) to have abundant life]

- ***In Christ, there is Debt-Forgiveness (13b-14)***

[*Captivity*: You need Christ and _____ (good works, our baptism ...) to be justified/reconciled to God.]

- ***In Christ, there is Triumph...Already (15)***

[*Captivity*: You need Christ and _____ (and a *distant* hope and a contentedness in defeat ...) until Christ returns.]

- ***In Christ, there is Fulfillment of O.T. Shadows (16-17)***

[*Captivity*: You need Christ and _____ (various feasts, washings, sacrifices ...) to worship God rightly.]

Discussion 3: “In Christ--Worship, Mission, and Community”

- *How do the “in Christ” indicatives speak to how we worship?*
- *How do the “in Christ” indicatives speak to how we proclaim the gospel in mission?*
- *How do the “in Christ” indicatives speak to how we fellowship?*



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