**Study Notes on Colossians 2:8-15**

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*Thursday, July 16, 2015*

NOTE: These notes are not intended to read as an article or well-rounded written work. Rather, this is a collage of different research and resources that will assist in the preparation of a sermon.

**Working Sermon Title**: Find True Life In Christ

**Summary of the Passage**: Have you ever felt empty? A life without God will lead to emptiness. God knew that so He sent His Son to make us fully alive in Christ. Through faith we can experience the daily powerful working of God.

**Outline of the passage:**

What the danger is (v. 8)

Help for the danger (9-15)

1. Christ put off our old man and put on our new man (9-13)
2. We are forgiven to receive the fullness of God (14-15)

**The Main Point of the Passage:**

**Exegetical Idea**: The fullness of God dwells in Jesus Christ and we can fully identify with Christ because of his sacrifice on the Cross.

**Theological Idea**: The fullness of God is in Christ and a believer is sanctified fully only in Him.

**Applicational Idea**: True spiritual life is found only in Christ because He is only God.

**What do they need to know?**

Christ is enough. True spiritual vibrancy is found when we embrace Jesus solely, not Jesus plus something else.

**Why do they need to know it?**

Because many of us know that Jesus is God, but find other things to give us spiritual vibrancy, thinking they will bring us closer to God but they leave us empty handed.

**What do they need to do?**

It is more about elimination than addition; they need to identify the things they have added to their relationship with God that may be keeping them from God Himself.

**Why do they need to do it?**

Because when they get back to an essentialism mindset over Christ alone they will snap out of spiritual busyness and into greater spiritual dependence.

BOOK OR ARTICLE IDEA: ***“BLUR:*** *Eliminate spiritual busyness to* *achieve greater Christ dependence.”*

**PRINCIPLES IN THIS PASSAGE:**

* False teaching is a serious threat.
* Christians are open to being deceived and we must stand strong.
* Jesus Christ is fully God.
* All of us have spiritual fullness in Christ, nothing else is needed.
* Jesus defeated Satan on the Cross and therefore had power over all authorities.

**Possible Preaching Outline**:

1. Set guards against spiritual deception (2:8)
   1. *By philosophy*
   2. *Empty deceit*
   3. *Human tradition*
   4. *Elementals of the spirit world*
2. Embrace Christ as the sufficient Savior (2:9-10)
   1. *Christ is fully God*
   2. *We have been filled with the fullness of Christ*
3. Eliminate the efforts of the flesh (2:11-13a)
   1. *We are no longer a physical rite to God*
   2. *We are buried with Him*
   3. *We are raised with Him*
   4. *We are made alive with Him*
4. Enjoy the freedom only found in Christ (2:13b-15)
   1. *He forgave us of our debts*
   2. *He put to shame all other powers over us*

Overarching Principle: spiritual busyness undervalues Christ’s righteousness.

Imperative action: Eliminate unessential spiritual activity to gain greater vibrancy in Christ.

**CONTEXT BEFORE AND AFTER THIS PASSAGE:**

BEFORE: The previous verses lay out Paul’s ministry and his calling to make the mystery of Christ known to all men, the hope of glory.

AFTER: the passage after this we are called to put off the old flesh and take on Christ, setting our mind on things that are above.

**Exegesis and Commentary:**

**2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elementals of the spirit world, and not according to Christ**.

Coming right out of his instruction to stay **rooted** and **built up** in the truth of Jesus Christ, he now warns them to not be deceived. He didn’t want them to be (lit. trans) *robbed* or *kidnapped* by false teaching. The idea was that they are now alive and free in Christ and he didn’t want anyone to take them captive.

Outline of the verse:

*See to it that no one takes you captive:*

1. *By philosophy*
2. *Empty deceit (“Hollow” or “Deceptive”)*
3. *Human tradition*
4. *Elementals of the spirit world*

The church at Colossae was not sick, but they were at risk. False teachers were rising up in their midst and Paul was admonishing them to stay on guard. “**See to it**” was a way to say “Heads up” and “warning” or “you need to pay attention.”

It would have ben tempting for them to put their faith in their own efforts or godless yet moral lifestyles. He wanted them to be only rooted in Christ and the outflow of that to be the fruits of steadfastness and righteousness.

They way that he says **no one** lets us know that he probably had a person or people in mind. He was not giving a blanket “**Be on guard**” statement, but was specifically warning of danger that was crouching at their doorstep.

Paul saw false prophets as “Men-stealers” taking away from God the very ones He had purchased with His own blood.

The idea of **taking captive** in the Greek was commonly used for plundering the cargo of a ship. The false teachers were possibly *plundering* what had been invested in the people of the church through the Gospel of Christ.

I have been in the church long enough to see that there is a very real threat of people being carried away by new ideas, latest fads, feelings over truth or deceptive philosophies of men.

**Human tradition** was possibly speaking to the traditions of the Jews to find righteousness outside of Christ, but it was more likely this was addressing pagan acts of spirituality.

One of the ways that the people were at risk to be deceived was by the philosophies of the false teachers. The term **philosophy** was probably more highly used then than it is today. Josephus refers to the teachings of the Jewish leaders as *philosophies* rather than teaching. This is the only place it is used in the NT. All of the thoughts about God or the world at that time were considered *philosophies*, not just in pagan spheres but also in Jewish and Greek educational systems.

These teaching were **empty** and not filled with all the fullness of God (v. 10). Another translation of **empty** can be “Hallow”.

The **elemental spirits** can also be translated “the basic principles” of that world. Another way to say that is the fundamental principles. This could be of learning and education or of religion. In an extreme interpretation, this could be understood as demonic spirits or things that are “other than God” in principle and authority.

The fundamental problem with all four of these warning that Paul is giving is that they are **not according to Jesus Christ** or the Gospel that had been proclaimed among them. A literal translation is “**not after Christ**”.

**2:9 For in Him the whole fullness of the deity dwells bodily,**

“**For**” links back to the warning of verse 8 and gives the why behind the warning and why they must be on guard.

As we looked at in 1:15-20, Jesus is the image of the invisible God. In both His incarnation and glorification we know that Jesus is God with flesh on. The idea of **lives** or **dwells** literally conveys they idea of God taking up residence in Him. In Christ, God found a settled and pleasant home.

The next six verses are making the point that everything you need is in Christ. Because they are forgiven, they already have a new life in him. They should not turn to anything else to be complete in their spiritual well-being.

When the enemy attacks us, he likes to go after two things first:

1. The identity of Christ.
2. The identity of the believer in Christ.

This passage is to again validate that Christ is the true God in bodily form.

Verse 9 and 10 are saying “we are full in the full one.” Or “Christ is all—and all you need.”

The **whole fullness** is away of saying the same things twice – whole and fullness are the same idea. Paul is making clear that EVERYTHING of God is in Christ. There is no reason to be deceived because of the deity that is in Christ. No other spiritual being – angels, demons or Satan (who is a fallen angel) have the fullness of God in them. Only Christ is an exact imprint of God.

Oh the worth of Christ! He is God made known to us!

**2:10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.**

This is a remarkable statement! **You have been filled in Him!** This affirms the power and redemption of Christ.

The very key to Colossians is that Christ is the fullness of God and believers are “Filled in Him.” We have everything we need in Jesus Christ. We do not need any other teaching to become like God; **He is everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).**

The idea of being **filled in Him** does not mean that we are full of the same deity that is in Christ. Rather we are made full in Christ (not God the father), meaning that only by Him we share in the righteousness of God. The perfection of Christ is not transferred to us, but rather nothing is left wanting in us for life and godliness. All of our spiritual needs is fully met and we do not need to turn to any other source to find more of God.

By possessing Christ, we possess all we need.

The Colossian people didn’t have to turn to empty philosophies or other traditions. We simply had to rest in God alone.

Charles Wesley said, “Thou, O Christ, art all I want, / More than all in Thee I find.”

The term **head** is to show that he truly is the authority over all powers and rulers. He is the head because He is fully God. You can’t be fully God unless you have authority over all things. This headship also speaks to the sufficiency of Christ for us to find all the fullness of life in Him alone.

The people in Colossae would have lived in fear of the demonic rule, but they didn’t have to live that way because of the power that is in Christ.

**“Greater is the power in you than the power in the world.”**

**2:11 In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,**

Paul is using a very visual image of **putting of the flesh** but **not by physical hands**, rather a spiritual cutting away of the old and putting on the new **circumcision of Jesus Christ.**

The Jews were masters of physical rites. They knew what they had to do to be righteous according to the law, but they had yet to understand what it meant to be made righteous only in Christ. They knew what it meant to be **circumcised** according to the Abrahamic law. This was a physical symbol of their dedication to the covenant relationship they shared with God.

Believers are no longer to live in a sphere of sinful and fleshly influence but have surrendered to spiritual influence. **The body** of flesh is put away and a spiritually renewed mind emerges and now clothes the believer. There is nothing on earth that can make us more spiritual. Christ is the only means by which we can be made spiritually alive.

The be circumcised of the flesh is to be freed from the power of the sinful nature **by the mighty power of God.**

**Galatians 5:24, “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”**

We have been transferred to the kingdom of God and live through Him and in Him. We are under His lordship and believe that he is supreme over all things. The **circumcision** Paul was speaking of was a putting away – or cutting away - of the fleshly desires of the “Old man” and putting on the new man.

The Bible was clear in the OT as well as the NT that **physical circumcision** didn’t save anyone (Deut 10:16, 30:6, Romans 2:28-29).

***What does it mean to be circumcised spiritually?***

For the heart of a man to be changed with power of the sin nature cut away and replaced by the new nature in Christ.

**Romans 2:29, “But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.”**

**Philippians 3:3, “For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh”**

It means that we are no long identifying with the first Adam, but are now in the new Adam – the first born of all creation. No longer are we only identified in our sin but are seen in Christ’s righteousness. In order to live for God we must be grafted into the new Adam and no longer under the old Adam. This is the only way we can live for God.

The old Adam is sinful, fallen and corrupt.

The new Adam is righteous, holy and perfect.

**Romans 6:6, “We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.”**

The doing away with the old man is not done by physical hands, but is a spiritual act done by a powerful and sovereign God.

**2:12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raise Him from the dead.”**

Key Phrases:

1. Buried with Him
2. Raised with Him
3. Made alive with Him (v. 13)

This passage is giving us the right to identify with Christ in His death and life. The rite of **baptism** is to say, “I am with Him” and we are given that right, not because of our righteousness, but because of Christ’s righteousness.

Dying signifies the death to the power of sin and Satan and the rising again is to embrace ability to live in the new life that Christ calls the believer to live in as we imitate God (Romans 6:3-11).

The idea of being **buried and raised** with Christ is not simply burying an old way of life and then rising again to a new way of life; rather it carries the idea of deriving life by sharing with Him in this experience. The means by which we share in this with Christ is **by faith in the mighty power of God.**

**Baptism** is not some magical rite but an act of obedience as we confess our faith and embark on a symbol of spiritual significance. Faith is what saves us, baptism is merely a ceremony only infused with meaning when true faith is present.

**2:13 and you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven our trespasses,**

**And you** is significant because Paul is assuring the reader that they too will share in the resurrection of Christ. I Christ’s case it was a physical rising, but for us it is a raising from the spiritual death we all had in the first Adam. Of course we too will be raised from death in the end, though this is not the emphasis of this passage.

The very thing that brings spiritual death is the **trespasses** we committed by the very nature of being **uncircumcised** in our flesh. Remember how Paul told the Jews they were **uncircumcised in their hearts and ears** in Acts 7:51.

It is futile to look for any other means to be saved or to become spiritually mature than by Christ. Because all the fullness of God dwelt in Him, all **wisdom and knowledge** is found solely in Him.

**2:14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.**

In the Greco-Romans world there was a written list of debts that would be under a persons’ name. Paul uses this word picture to characterize the way that a person can be indebted to God and the only way out is to have it paid or forgiven. Think of this record as an IOU.

The **legal demands** were the regulations of the law that a personal had violated. These were not things still up for a verdict but rather were things that we were fully guilty of. The understanding of this in the original context was a list that the person has confessed up to. A self-indictment. Barclay said, “I tis a charge-list which , as it were, they themselves had signed and had admitted was accurate.” Bruce calls it s a “signed confession of indebtedness.”

The idea of these being **canceled** means that they are literally washed out, erased or wiped out. “The bond we had to not fulfilling the mosaic law had been removed permanently, that is, removed so that its claims against us can never again alienate us from God.” (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary)

God is the only one who can take away what a person owes and this happens when faith is placed in God through Jesus Christ. The payment was the death of Jesus Christ and the fact he was **nailed to the cross** to appease the wrath of God against our indebtedness. It is a great word picture to say that our “Record of debts” are “nailed to the cross” with Jesus Christ. He took our sins upon himself to make us free in the righteousness of Christ.

**2:15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him.**

Again expressing the supremacy of Christ, he points to the power that Christ has over all spiritual authorities. On the cross, all power of once and for all stripped from the power of rulers and authorities over the Christian’s life. Now that was given to Christ. We submit to that authority daily in faith to Christ. The emphasis here is spiritual authorities.

We will continue to struggle with these powers (Eph 6:12, 16) but the power in us is Christ. He is over any power that will ever come against us.

Jesus put these authorities to **open shame** publically revealing their failures to deliver or give life. It is only by Christ a person is able to have the power of God in their life. He **triumphed over them,** giving an image of roman military victory to the original reader. Jesus defeats the powers at be and takes back all which has been plundered.