

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

Complete in Him 2

Colossians 2:10 – 15

Paul's struggle on behalf of the Colossians was that they would find that Christ is all they needed. He understood that it was a battle to for them to reach all the riches that comes from a full assurance of understanding – resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ. It was a fight to come to the place where they realized that in Christ they were complete. *'and in Him you have been made complete, who is the head of all rule and authority.* Colossians 2:10 **All of the answers to all of life's questions are found in Him.** All the answers to all the questions in your soul, all the answers for your sin, all the answers for your hope in the life to come are found only in Christ.

We have been forgiven in Christ - *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.* Ephesians 4:32

We are justified and redeemed in Christ - *and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,* Romans 3:24

We are dead to sin and alive in Christ - *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.* Romans 6:11

There is no condemnation in Christ - *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Romans 8:1

We are reconciled to God in Christ - *that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.* 2 Corinthians 5:19

We have been crucified in Christ - *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* Galatians 2:20

Grace comes to us in Christ - *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,* 1 Corinthians 1:4

Our salvation is in Christ - *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.* 2 Timothy 2:10

Eternal life is in Christ - *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Romans 6:23

We are a new creation in Christ - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* 2 Corinthians 5:17

Our sonship is in Christ - *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.* Galatians 3:26

The blessing and the promise are ours in Christ - *so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.* Galatians 3:14

Our liberty is in Christ - *For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.* Romans 8:2

Our unity is in Christ - *so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.* Romans 12:5

Our sanctification is in Christ - *To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:* 1 Corinthians 1:2

All our overcoming is in Christ - *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.* 2 Corinthians 2:14

Every spiritual blessing is ours in Christ - *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,* Ephesians 1:3

Both suffering and consolation are in Christ - *For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.* 2 Corinthians 1:5

The purpose of God is in Christ - *making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ* Ephesians 1:9

Because of Christ we are in Christ - *And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,* 1 Corinthians 1:30

And we could go on and on and on. There is so much in Christ. Everything about the Christian life is in Christ. To borrow from Kuyper: **There is not a single square inch of your existence as a believer over which Christ who is sovereign over all does not say 'Mine'!** Everything relates to Him – everything answers to Him – everything finds its relevance and meaning in Him. And this is what Paul was laboring in prayer and the word for the Colossians – that they would have this imprinted on their souls and exhibited in their lives. That in Christ – they have been made complete. And so Paul goes on to give them five solid pillars of truth to hang their Christian experience on.

Circumcision

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, Colossians 2:11 Paul compares the saving work of Christ in us with the Old Testament practice of circumcision – the cutting away of the foreskin of Jewish baby boys. Circumcision then was the evidence, the proof that they were God's chosen people. Without that mark – they were just another Gentile. But here the circumcision is without hands – meaning that it is not a physical thing but a spiritual thing. **And what is cut away is the old, unbelieving, rebellious self and its use of the body for sin and not for righteousness.** The Bible calls it heart surgery: *But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.* Romans 2:29 That is how God makes us His own – He does surgery on our cold, hard, unbelieving hearts and transforms them into soft, obedient, believing hearts. And it is true then of His children that instead of being hostile to God – we love Him; instead of going our own way without a thought of God – He now invades our thoughts and we become God-conscious. Sin that we never used to blink at – now we mourn; attitudes we once held without shame – now we tremble. And Paul calls this the circumcision of Christ. It is a work that only He can do – and a work that He only does for those who believe.

Baptism and Resurrection

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. Colossians 2:12b This verse is a clause of the preceeding sentence where Paul tells us that our old, sinful hearts have been removed and replaced with new hearts – just as God promises in Ezekiel: *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My rules.* Ezekiel 36:26-27 And Paul says, that this circumcision is connected to a death – ours and His.

When we believe and are baptized – God is at work, circumcising our hearts, putting the old rebellious self in the ground, and raising up the new self, created in righteousness and holiness. Baptism is our identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. In and of itself, it is nothing. But notice Paul's words here - *through faith in the powerful working of God.* This means that it isn't baptism that does anything – but God who is at work in Christ in us. Just as circumcision outwardly identified Jews as God's chosen people – it is baptism that is the outward identification of the believer. It is a picture of dying to the old life of sin, and publicly announcing that to the world he is dead to the old life. And it is a proclamation that a resurrection has taken place – he has been raised to new life in Christ. *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him,* Colossians 2:13a

Forgiveness

having forgiven us all our trespasses, Colossians 2:13b Two things are essential for us to be raised from the deadness of our sins and the uncircumcision of our flesh and the first is that we need forgiveness. All of mankind lives under the sentence of death because of sin and there is nothing we could do to pay the debt we owe. The first battle we fight in coming to Christ is the battle over the guilt of sin. Unless a man recognizes that he is a sinner before God and worthy of death, he will not come. That is why the Bible emphasizes the fact that *there is none righteous, no not one – all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* We recognize this in society. In fact Karl Menninger, the famed psychiatrist, once said that if he could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the next day! But rebellious man is reluctant to admit that he is a sinner, and to acknowledge Christ as the one who forgives, and until he does, his trespasses remain unforgiven.

And our sins are forgiven, not on the basis of the depth of our sorrow over them, or the quality of our repentance – our sins are forgiven only because of the death of Christ. Oswald Chambers wrote: ***We trample the blood of the Son of God if we think we are forgiven because we are sorry for our sins. The only explanation for the forgiveness of God and for the unfathomable depth of His forgetting is the death of Jesus Christ. Our repentance is merely the outcome of our personal realization of the atonement which He has worked out for us.*** Oswald Chambers

Justification

The other essential element is justification. It is not enough that our sins are forgiven – the really good news is that in Christ we are justified, made righteous. Justification goes beyond forgiveness. And here is how He did it: *by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross.* Colossians 2:14 Men in general are under the illusion that they are pretty much okay. Talk to anyone today and ask them if they think they are a good person and most people will tell you that they are. What most men do not realize is that in the court of heaven there is a record of debt that stands as a testimony against them. And the charges listed there all fall under the heading of the list of commandments in Exodus 20: God-haters, liars, thieves, adulterers, covetous, blasphemers, rebellious. And the question really is, how could God forgive such people? And not only forgive them but justify them? And the answer again, is in Christ. **God requires two things of us: punishment for our sins and perfection in our living.** Our sins must be punished and our lives must be righteous. We can neither bear our own punishment nor provide our own righteousness. So God, in Christ, did both for us. Christ died for our sins – taking our punishment; and He covers us with His robes of righteousness by fulfilling the whole law.

When Christ died on the cross – the record of your debt on file with the court of heaven was nailed to the cross. In Roman times, it was customary for the authorities, when they crucified a man, to nail the record of charges against him above his head on the cross. They had a problem with Jesus though – He had broken no law – He was guilty of nothing – but something had to be written and above His head in three languages they wrote – 'King of the Jews'. In other words – He was crucified for the truth – He was King of the Jews. But more importantly, above His head in the heavens was our record of debt with its legal demand for our death – but the Father took that debt and instead of holding it up in front of our face to condemn us, He put it in the palm of His Son's hand and drove a nail through it to the cross. My sin, my shame, my debt – His hands, His feet, His side – on the cross. He was our substitute – and in His death we are justified. *It does not matter who or what we are; there is absolute reinstatement into God by the death of Jesus Christ and by no other way, not because Jesus Christ pleads, but because He died. It is not earned, but accepted. All the pleading which deliberately refuses to recognize the Cross is of no avail; it is battering at a door other than the one that Jesus has opened. Our Lord does not pretend we are all right when we are all wrong. The atonement is a propitiation whereby God, through the death of Jesus, makes an unholy man holy.* Oswald Chambers

Victory

The other effect of the death of Christ was the open defeat of our enemies and His. *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame (made a public display), by triumphing over them in Him.* Colossians 2:15 The only weapon our adversary had against us was taken away. **Through Christ's death on the cross, Satan's power to intimidate and control people through the threat of death and eternal separation from God was broken.** *Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* 1 Corinthians 15:54-57

The word picture Paul paints here is one that people of that time were well acquainted with. When a Roman general won a war – he would be given a triumph. It was essentially a parade honoring the genius and fortitude of the general and it meant first of all that the war was over. The enemy had been defeated and subdued, and in the train of his parade would be captured booty and conquered enemy combatants as a sign of his victory. The conquering general would be given gifts of houses, land, money and other things from a grateful citizenry and government. But in Ephesians we see Christ giving gifts to men – not receiving them: *Therefore it says, When He ascended on high He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.* Ephesians 4:8 In the train of Christ's triumph on the cross were all the enemies of our soul and one of the gifts to us was complete victory over all the hosts of hell.

Paul's words here in verse 15 are not just mere platitudes – he clearly states that what happened at the cross was a public display of Christ's victory over sin and death and the devil. And the gospel of Luke records a remarkable scene in chapter 23: *It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit! And having said this He breathed his last. Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, Certainly this man was innocent! And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.* Luke 23:47-49

So the natural question is 'What did they see?' What made a battle-scarred and hardened Roman soldier – who was used to putting people to death on crosses suddenly realize he had executed an innocent man? What made the hostile, God-hating crowd beat their breasts for sorrow? What they saw, the centurion and the multitudes, was a public display. What do you need for a public spectacle? You need a spectacle and you need a public. Here were both. The darkness was not as some suppose, a lunar or solar eclipse, or a passing cloud, or the sun setting early, because the sun, the Bible says, was 'obscured'. Rather it must have been directly related to the satanic, demonic activity around the cross, literally blotting out the sun. It is as though God gathered up all the demonic forces and made them attend at this particular place and time to demonstrate His own power and authority. The Father took the record book of charges that Satan uses to accuse man before God and nailed it to the cross – writing 'Paid in full' over it in blood-red ink. And Christ literally led a triumphal procession of defeated foes from the cross – publicly shaming them. When He did that, they had no more ammunition. He disarmed them. He broke the defenses of death and hell, Satan and his demons and triumphed over them publicly at the cross. It was something visible and real. And seeing the power of God caused at least one man to believe and the rest to be sorrowful, repenting and beating their breasts at what they had witnessed.

So what does this mean for us? What this means is victory – what this means is justification – what this means is forgiveness – it is death of the old and birth of the new – it means a new heart and the Spirit of God living in us to walk in God's statutes and follow His will. It means that all our issues are settled at the cross of Christ. For those who believe may this be the solid rock of our salvation – we are in Christ and His death and His overcoming life are sufficient for all our needs. For those who are yet in darkness, I pray that the brilliant light of the truth that is in Jesus break through all your night and lead you to Christ.

Our gracious God and compassionate Father,

May the truth of Your word this morning reach deep into our souls and find a resting place there. May the truth that in Christ is all our hope and joy banish the lie we have lived under and set us free to live as sons of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Grant that we would revel in the love that removes our cold and stony hearts and replaces them with hearts that respond in adoration and praise to Your great love. May we live in the reality that we have died to the old life of sin and live now to righteousness. May we rejoice with everlasting joy that our sins are forgiven and we stand justified before the throne of God. Let our hearts swell with the news of Your victory over all our enemies and let us live as those who have been made glad in God and live to make others glad in You too, we pray in the precious and powerful name of Christ Jesus our Lord, Amen.

***May the Lord bless you and keep you
and make His face shine upon you.
May the Lord be gracious unto you;
May the Lord lift up His countenance on you
and give you peace.***