

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

Exalted Over Legalism

Colossians 2:11-17

Paul now turns from the *theological errors* that the false teachers were teaching, to the *manifestation* that resulted in *putting that heresy into practice*...progressing from **Gnosticism** into **legalism**. The **Gentile Christians** in **Colossae** had no reason or need to conform to **Jewish rules** and *regulations* such as *circumcision* or *dietary restraints*. In **Christ**, they had been made **complete**.

I. OUR SALVATION IS COMPLETE IN CHRIST: (vs. 11-12)

Healings were an essential element of our Lord's earthly ministry. They established His *messianic credentials*, showed the *tender compassion* of God, and *foreshadowed the millennial kingdom* to come...when God will put an end to all disease and sickness. When Jesus *healed*...He completely healed them *physical*. Our Lord's healings also illustrated an important principle about *salvation*.

He does the same *spiritually*. He provides complete *salvation* when He heals *spiritually*. *Salvation* doesn't need to be supplemented by *false humanistic philosophy* or *psychology, ritualism, mysticism, self-denial, or any other human work*. In Christ, we have been made **complete**.

And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ (vs. 11)...

Every **Jewish** boy was **circumcised** on the **8th day** after his birth (**Leviticus 12:2-3**). It was the sign that he *belonged to the covenant nation* (**Genesis 17:10-14**). It was the *outward demonstration* that man was born *sinful* and needed *cleansing*. From the beginning though, **circumcision** was only used symbolically to illustrate the desperate need that man had for *cleansing of the heart*.

“Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.”

~Deuteronomy 30:6

God has always been concerned with the *heart*...and not with a *physical ritual*. For Christians...the physical rite of **circumcision** is unnecessary because we have already been **circumcised with a circumcision made without hands**.

In Christ, we've been **circumcised**. This *spiritual circumcision* is done by Christ...not by man. It's a circumcision of the heart.

“But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.”

~Romans 2:29

Body of the flesh...refers to *the sinful, fallen human nature* totally dominating a person before *salvation*.

“Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called ‘Uncircumcision’ by the so-called ‘Circumcision,’ which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

~Ephesians 2:11-13

Their *sinful nature*...the **body of the flesh**...was decisively *put off* ...removed by Christ's *death* and *resurrection*. What people were in **Adam**... *sinful, fallen, and corrupt*...was destroyed by Christ. Now as a believer, they are *in Christ*...and a *new creation*.

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

~II Corinthians 5:17

Removal...Gk. *apekdysri*, means *a total breaking away from... putting off*...and it's only used here in the New Testament. This removal of...the *total breaking away from*...the *old life* occurs at the moment of *salvation*.

“For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”

~Philippians 3:3

Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead (vs. 12)...

When viewed as a rite necessary for *salvation*, **baptism** is as point-less as **circumcision**. When a believer **has been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20)**, he is then **buried with Christ** by the *power* of the Holy Spirit. He is then **raised with Him through faith in the working of God** to new life.

The working of God...Working, Gk. *energeia*, refers to *God's active power*...the same *power* that **raised Jesus from the dead**.

Water baptism pictures this *burial* and *resurrection*. In *water baptism, immersion* portrays being *buried with Christ*...and *coming out of the water* depicts the *resurrection* by the *power of God* to live a *new life*.

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

~Romans 6:3-4

II. OUR FORGIVENESS IS COMPLETE IN CHRIST: (vs. 13-14)

Forgiveness is perhaps the *most exciting* and *comforting doctrine* in all of Scripture, because it's what we as *guilty sinners* need to be made right with God. Before a person is liberated to a *new life in Christ*, he is *dead* in his *sins* and *subjected* to his *sinful nature*...he is *separated* from God.

Keep in mind...*death* means *separation*...not *annihilation*. Even the *unsaved* bear the **image of God (Genesis 1:27; I Corinthians 11:7; James 3:9)**. Even though they have *human life*, they are *cut off* from *spiritual life*. To be *spiritually dead* means that one is unable to respond to any *spiritual stimuli*...just as to be *physically dead* means than one is unable to respond to *physical stimuli*.

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions (vs. 13)...

This is a beautiful picture of the *transformation* that is made from *spiritual death* to *new life* in Christ. God **made you alive together with Christ**. That's what it means to be *born again*.

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience...But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

~Ephesians 2:1-2, 4-6

The same power that *raised* Christ from the dead (vs. 12) *resurrects* believing sinners to *spiritual life* (vs. 13). This new life comes when God *forgives us from all our sins*...resulting in His **having canceled out the certificate of debt** that we owe Him.

That God *forgives* the *sins* of those who *trust* in Him and includes them in His *eternal kingdom* and *glory* is the *most important truth* of Scripture.

Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross (vs. 14)...

Paul illustrates God's *forgiveness* by using a **certificate of debt**.

Certificate of debt...literally means *something written with the hand...an autograph*. It was used to refer to a *certificate of indebtedness* handwritten by the debtor to *acknowledge* his debt.

Because of God's written **Law**, people stood condemned before Him. It's as if there was a **certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us**. And since it is impossible for people to keep all the **Law** it is like a *bill of indebtedness* that we are *unable to pay*.

He has taken it out of the way...In Christ the **Law** is *fulfilled*...it's *done away with*. It's *paid*.

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”

~Romans 8:2

Having nailed it to the cross...He took that **certificate of debt** and marked it **“Paid in full”**...and **nailed it to the cross** showing it’s been paid and that He has wiped the slate clean of any **decree against us**. It’s the picture of one erasing a white board that’s been written on.

III. OUR LIBERTY IS COMPLETE IN CHRIST: (vs. 15-17)

Legalism is the *religion of human achievement*. It argues that *spirituality* is based on Christ *plus human works*. It makes *conformity to man-made rules* the *measure of spirituality*.

Legalism is useless though, because *it can’t restrain the flesh*. It’s also *dangerously deceptive* because someone can *conform* to a set of *rules, rituals, and performance based standards* and not be a *true believer*.

When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him (vs. 15)...

The image here is like that of a *triumphant Roman general parading his defeated captives* through the streets of **Rome**. Christ’s victory on the cross *defeated* Satan and his demons...**the rulers and authorities**.

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.”

~II Corinthians 2:14

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day (vs. 16)...

Believers are delivered from **the rulers and authorities** which encouraged *legalistic rules* about *food* and *festivals*. No one should act as our judge in regard to what we *eat* or *drink* because Christians are free from the **Law’s legalistic requirements**...such as those in **Leviticus 11, Leviticus 17, and Deuteronomy 14**. God *does not condemn* anything believers eat.

“Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The

one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.”

~Romans 14:1-3

Because the **Colossians** were under the *New Covenant*, the *dietary laws* of the *Old Covenant* were no longer in force.

This liberty towards believers also pertains to **festivals** such as a **New Moon** celebration or a **Sabbath day**.

Festival...one of the *annual Jewish celebrations* such as **Passover, Pentecost, the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Lights (Leviticus 23)**. Sacrifices were also offered on the **new moon**, or the *first day of the month (Numbers 28:11-14)*.

Even today, *legalistic observance* of the **Sabbath** is a good example of how people allow themselves to be held in *bondage* by the **Law**. But there are several reasons given in Scripture as to how Christ fulfilled the **Law** and why there is now *grace*...*grace* that leads us to worship in *liberty*...with *freedom*.

- The **Sabbath** command is the *only commandment* of the **Ten Commandments not repeated** in the New Testament.
- *Early believers*...following Christ’s *resurrection* and His post resurrection appearance on the *third day*...a **Sunday (Mark 16:1; John 20:1)**, began to meet on Sundays for their worship (**Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:2**).
- The *Jerusalem Council* didn’t impose *keeping the Sabbath* on **Gentile** believers (**Acts 15**).
- **Paul** warned the **Gentiles** about many *different sins* in his epistles, but *never about breaking the Sabbath*.
- As **Paul** put it...the Old Testament **Law** (including the **Sabbath**) was only a **shadow of what is to come. The substance belongs to Christ. Substance**...Gk. *soma*, literally means *body*.

Things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ (vs. 17)...

What the Old Testament *foreshadowed*...Christ *fulfilled*.

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.”

~Matthew 5:17

A *shadow* is only *an image cast by an object which represents its form*. Also in order to have a *shadow*, there must be *light*.

“Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.’”

~John 8:12

Once one finds Christ, he no longer needs to follow the old shadow.

“[One Sacrifice of Christ Is Sufficient]...For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year.”

~Hebrews 10:1-3

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- Salvation is completely apart from any **RELIGIOUS RITUAL**. Salvation is through the **COMPLETED WORK** of Jesus Christ. Nothing else is needed...He is *sufficient*. **Circumcision** and **baptism** are *superfluous* in regards to *salvation*.
- True spirituality doesn't consist merely of keeping **EXTERNAL RULES**...but of having an **INNER RELATIONSHIP** with Jesus Christ...a heart for God.
- Don't sacrifice your **FREEDOM IN CHRIST** for a set of **MAN-MADE RULES**. Don't let man hold you captive with a performance based religion.