

# Jesus is enough

Colossians 2:8-15

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Are you an impulsive shopper? If so, which strategy usually works on you? Is it the save “5 euros with a minimum purchase of 50 euros”? Or maybe the “2 for the price of 1”, even though you don’t even need or want the first one? Or is it the “limited time only”, where you push the “buy now” button and stop to think about it later? Or is it buying what seems to be trending or popular now because everyone else has one? To which marketing strategy are you most susceptible?

To which theological false teacher are you most susceptible? Is it the one who has the title Doctor or Pastor in front of their names, meaning that they must surely know what they are talking about? Or the one who is from your same denomination? Or the one who has the biggest church and the fancy car, because it seems like they understand how to be blessed by God? Or maybe it is the YouTube preacher who has the most followers? Or maybe it is an author who has written the most best-selling books? Or maybe it is the teacher who says what we want to hear? Or the teacher that speaks of a God who will help us get the kind of life that we want? Or the teacher who talks a lot about grace, blessing and peace, but very little about sin, repentance, and glorifying God. . . even in our suffering?

In Colossians 2:8-15, Paul continues to help the new believers in Colossae guard against false teachers who are seeking to lead them away from Christ and the gospel. Paul is in prison in Rome, so he writes this letter and then continues to agonize in prayer on their behalf.

***<sup>8</sup>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.***

Helping the Colossians remain free from false teaching was Paul’s goal. Paul used the imagery of not being “taken captive”. The Greek word used here was the idea of a slave-dealer carrying away captives from a conquered nation. It was bad enough that holiness had been lost in the Garden of Eden in the beginning and that we all possessed a nature to sin, but it was truly tragic to think that some who had already been set free in Christ were now susceptible to being taken captive by these false teachers.

Paul was exhorting them to be intentional, not accidental. Purposefully protect yourself, be attentive, keep your guard up. As we read in 1 Peter 5:8, *“Be sober-minded; be watchful”,* remembering that *“your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”* Make sure that no one takes you captive, spiritually lures you away and takes you where you do not want to go, by philosophy and empty deceit.

It is similar to the idea of sheep. Sheep are notorious for following blindly.

Several years ago, in eastern Turkey in the Van province near Iran, there were shepherds who were caring for a flock of 1,500 sheep. They took a break and neglected the sheep while eating breakfast. During those few minutes the sheep wandered away towards a cliff that dropped off into a ravine 15 meters below. The first sheep fell to his death. The next 399 also followed and fell to their deaths. The remaining 1,100 sheep also followed and fell, but because the ravine was already filled with dead sheep their fall was cushioned and they survived.

Paul is exhorting the people in Colossae to not be like this. Don't just follow blindly the leading of the false teachers, taking for granted that whatever they say is correct. Evaluate what is being said. Be like the Bereans, in Acts 17, who after hearing Paul preach, *“received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”*

Every day, after even hearing the Apostle Paul's teaching, they would go to God's Word as their ultimate authority, to see if what Paul was saying was true. As we listen to the pastor, someone on YouTube, a small group discussion, or even advice from another believer, we should live with our gospel filter in place and our Bible filter on, listening, but then discerning if what we are hearing is truly in accordance with scripture.

Paul instructs them to not be taken captive by philosophy and empty deceit. The philosophies were merely ideas of man about man. We are in need of much more than that. Scripture speaks of God's wisdom that is so far above ours.

Proverbs 3:5-6 instructs us to, *“Trust the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your path.”*

In 1 Corinthians 2:9 Paul quotes these words, *“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.”*

Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

Paul is calling us beyond mere philosophies of man to Spirit-revealed truths of God. That we would not be lured away by mere captivating ideas of man. Paul also warns against vain deceit. The meaning of this word gives us even more understanding. The word for “deceit” originally meant fishhook. That word provides us with a clear picture. A fishhook is camouflaged by bait of some kind that attracts the fish. The fish is lured in, eats the bait and swallows the hook. The false teachers were doing the same thing. They were offering dangerous false teachings that were presented as something important and desirable, but in the end led to danger.

The false teaching was appealing to the elemental spirits of the world that were in contradiction to the teachings of Christ. One use of this word for “elemental” referred to the stars. Throughout history there were many who put their trust in the stars. Julius Caesar, Augustus, Vespasian, and even Alexander the Great believed so strongly in the dominion of the stars that they would not take a step without seeking counsel from the stars. Many believed that their entire lives were determined by the stars, making them slaves to the stars. In this meaning the Gnostics would have acknowledged the goodness of Jesus, but proclaimed that only they had the secret wisdom that would free a person from the elemental or spirits that were found in the stars. This false teaching about the stars would have been the reason for Paul’s clear writings in this letter about Christ’s lordship over all creation, in heaven and earth.

Another meaning of this word for “elemental” was that of something being elementary or very basic in nature. The false teaching appealed to the base desires and human logic. The false teachers were claiming to have some higher knowledge, but, when you listened to their teaching, all they were doing was catering to man’s natural sinful desires and logic.

We still see much of this today. Imagine you are listening to a sermon on YouTube. How do we know if it is trustworthy preaching? Here are several questions that will help you discern whether it is true or false. Is it teaching that falsely claims that mankind is naturally good and deserves even better, or that mankind is fallen, sinful, helpless and in desperate need of undeserved salvation through Jesus Christ? Is it wrongly using God to selfishly help you get what you want, or is it teaching us to live our life for God’s purposes and God’s glory, regardless the cost? Is it claiming that we can live the Christian life in our own power, or is it leading us to rely fully on the work of God in our lives? Is it using scripture as its basis, or is it relying more on the ideas of man? Is it moving us towards greater dependence on Christ, or to rely on ourselves and our own religious works and will power? Does it help us remember our sinfulness and His grace, or does it teach that we are good, and we just need to think more positively about ourselves?

Any teaching that points to any salvation other than Christ is not true? Christ is our only hope for salvation. It is in Christ that we have been redeemed, made new, and made righteous. If a teacher talks of what we need to do to earn salvation in our own works, will power, religious ritual or strict living, we know we are not listening to a teacher who can be trusted. Jesus alone is our hope for both salvation and righteous living. That is the mystery of the gospel. When we were dead in our sin and hopelessly separated from God, Jesus came and did what we could not do for ourselves. He lived a perfect life and died on the cross for our sins. He took upon Himself the sinfulness of man and paid our penalty so that through faith we could be forgiven and reconciled to God. Salvation is not about who we are and what we have done. It is about who Christ is and what He has done.

It is interesting that Paul does not state the heresies or false teachings clearly in these pages. Instead, he drives us to Jesus. As we discussed in the previous verses, we need not prepare ourselves for all the false teachings that are in the world. We just need to be assured in Jesus. As we are then faced with false teaching, we will recognize them because we know the real Jesus.

*<sup>9</sup> For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.*

In Christ one finds salvation. Forgiveness and eternal life are given, but there is more. Colossians 2:10 expresses it in these words, ***“And you have been filled in Him (Christ), who is the head of all rule and authority.”*** In this verse the Greek word *pleroo* is translated “fullness”. It can also be translated to make complete in every particular, to render perfect <sup>1</sup>, and filled absolutely by him as the Giver.<sup>2</sup>

Pastor John MacArthur made the following comments concerning this passage:

*“No clearer a statement exists than that of Col. 2:10, you are complete in Him. Having the Lord Jesus Christ is to have everything needed in spiritual life for time and eternity. To have Him is to have everything. Not to have Him is to have absolutely nothing at all. All joy, peace, meaning . . . purpose, hope, fulfillment in life now and forever is bound up in Christ. And when a person receives Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they enter into an all-sufficient relationship with an all-sufficient Christ.”<sup>3</sup>*

Those who believe in Christ and become children of God will find that ***“Their fullness of life comes from Christ’s fullness. They partake of the divine nature through Christ.”***<sup>4</sup> This is clearly spoken of in 2 Pet. 1:3-4:

*“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”*

***“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ”*** (Eph. 1:3). It is in Christ that one now has access to all the resources of God.

Firsthand knowledge of our all-sufficient Savior is the best defense against being taken captive by false teachings. As one comes to know the Truth, falsehood will be exposed as a lie. As one comes to know the beauty and sufficiency of Christ, all else will fade in comparison.

Deity dwells in Christ and Christ dwells in us, but that does not make us God or move us towards a future possibility of becoming a god. We were made in the image of God. We are being made into the likeness of Christ. We have been reconciled to God and now have full access to the full resources of God. We were dead in our sin and now we have been made alive in Christ.

***<sup>11</sup> 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,<sup>12</sup> 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.***

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<sup>1</sup> James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, electronic ed. (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1996), G4137, Logos 2.1.

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996), 869, Logos 2.1.

<sup>3</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996), 869, Logos 2.1.

<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur, *The Sufficiency of Christ*, Grace to You Ministries, <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/80-36>.

<sup>11</sup> John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983-1985), 2:677.

This was not the first time Paul had come up against false teachers of this type. After Paul and his coworkers had started churches in Galatia, the churches were also infiltrated by Jewish false teachers. As always, the false teaching resembled the true teaching enough that those who were ignorant of God's truth or indecisive in their belief were prime prospects of being led away from the truth of the gospel. These false teachers did not deny Christ, but they demanded additional requirements to truly be a follower of Christ. Their false teachings included obeying the Jewish laws as prerequisites to salvation in Christ. It was the idea of "Christ . . . plus", as if Christ's death and resurrection were not enough to bring forgiveness and to make us holy. One of the Jewish laws that were being required was that of circumcision.

Circumcision was an outward sign that a person was set apart and different than others. It set the Jews apart from their neighboring nations. Circumcision was to be an outward symbol that the Jews were a "set apart" people, a people set apart for their God. It is similar to the word "holy". Holy means set apart, dedicated or consecrated to God for a sacred purpose. That is who the Jews were to be. A holy, set apart people. And this was shown outwardly by circumcision, trusting that it was a reflection of the condition of their hearts that were also "circumcised or set apart" for God.

Because of this, if a person had been physically circumcised, but their heart was not set apart for God, the physical circumcision was meaningless. On the other hand, if one's heart was "circumcised" and set apart for God and he had not been physically circumcised, he was still right with God. Ultimately, the focus was on the heart that was set apart for God, not the physical circumcision.

That is what Paul is talking about here. In Christ, the Colossians were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.

In scripture we often see the contrasting ideas of either living in the flesh, or living in the Spirit. Living in the flesh means living enslaved to our sinful human nature and desires. This idea at times was connected to the sin that we are led into by our fleshly appetites of our physical bodies. That was what the monks were trying to combat when they fasted, went without sleep, chose celibacy, keeping themselves from sexual relations, even self-flagellation where some used to beat themselves as the price for sin, seeking to subjugate their physical desires to righteous living.

The sinfulness of the flesh does include the sin that comes from our uncontrolled physical appetites, but it also includes any others sins that are rooted in our sinful nature. These would include selfishness, pride, greed and much more.

Living in the Spirit means that our sinful nature of the flesh has been put to death and set aside, and that we are now living under the lordship of the Spirit of Christ who lives in us.

The Colossians had been set apart, not by a human hand performing the physical act of circumcision, but by the spiritual act of God making them holy and consecrated for the purposes of God. This was accomplished by the "putting off the body of the flesh". We see a similar idea in Romans 8:13:

***"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."***

The Colossians had been "set apart" and made holy, but not by physical hands. It was something deeper. Their hearts were "circumcised and set apart" by putting off their flesh, their sinful desires,

passions and appetites of this world. They had died to these desires as if they no longer could even hear or sense their tempting call, as if these evil desires no longer even existed. This clearly set them apart from the people of the world.

At the physical circumcision that was done by human hands, the flesh or foreskin was cut and put off. At the spiritual circumcision of the heart done by Jesus Christ at salvation, their sinful flesh is put away and now they were made righteous, living in the Spirit.

The Colossians' hearts were circumcised by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ. The Colossians were only able to put off the body of the flesh because their hearts had first been circumcised by Christ. It was not their own doing. They were set apart because of their newfound holiness that had been granted them through Christ.

As we read in Deuteronomy 30:6, *"And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."*

As believers we see this same pattern. We are now set apart because we have put off the body of the flesh, and we have only been able to put off the body of the flesh because of what Christ has done in us. Holiness and right relation with God were not through the religious ritual of circumcision. A right relationship with God comes through the changed heart that comes through faith in Christ.

Paul then uses the word baptism to communicate one's complete immersion in and associated with Christ in his death and resurrection.

This is clearly seen in physical baptism. The physical baptism is an external example of what has already happened internally. Like physical circumcision, if a person is baptized by immersion, but their heart has not been changed by Christ, then being lowered into the water means nothing.

A person turns from their sin and puts their faith in Jesus Christ. The old body of the flesh and the sinful nature dies. Like the person being lowered into the water during baptism. They then are enveloped by, immersed in, fully associated with Christ in His death. The person is then raised from the water. This symbolizes the truth that they have been raised from the dead with Christ.

This is clearly seen in Romans 6:4, *"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."*

Paul then continues in verses 13-15:

*<sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

All mankind were and are dead in their sin. They have no power to atone for or overcome their sin. While we all were dead in our sin and the worldliness of our flesh, God gave us life in Him, having forgiven all our sin that separated us from Him, by canceling all the judgment and debt for sin that

we owed. This he annulled by paying it Himself in Christ. We owed the penalty of death for our sin and, in our place, Jesus claimed the sins of the world as His own and endured the punishment for those sins, dying in our place on the cross. Now the debt has been paid. He took upon Himself our sin so that we could take upon ourselves His righteousness.

William Barclay explains the phrase, “canceling the record of debt” in these words:

*“The substance on which ancient documents were written was either papyrus, a kind of paper made of the pith of the bulrush, or vellum, a substance made of the skins of animals. Both were fairly expensive and certainly could not be wasted. Ancient ink had no acid in it; it laid on the surface of the paper and did not, as modern ink usually does, bite into it. Sometimes a scribe, to save paper, used papyrus or vellum that had already been written upon. When he did that, he took a sponge and wiped the writing out. Because it was only on the surface of the paper, the ink could be wiped out as if it had never been. God, in his amazing mercy, banished the record of our sins so completely that it was as if it had never been; not a trace remained.”*

Because of this the rulers and authorities, which are seen as demonic spirits in various places in the New Testament, can no longer judge or condemn us. They were like our slave drivers or prison guards, accusing us, taunting us, lording over us as we were held captive by our sin. Justice was on their side because we were guilty and deserved judgment. But now that we are in Jesus we have been forgiven, justice has been satisfied in Christ, and we now walk free. Our slave drivers, the demonic spirits, no longer have power or dominion over us. In Christ they have been disarmed, defeated, and Christ now puts them to open shame by triumphing over them as the Romans did as they paraded their vanquished foes through the streets of Rome to everyone’s pleasure.

The majority of the world are still enslaved in sin and under the dominion of evil forces. It is here that we find Christ to be the solution that they so desperately need.

In these verses Paul has once again held up Christ in all His beauty. It is as we come to know Christ and stand in awe of the gospel that we are most fortified to stand against false teaching that seek to take us captive and rob us of the benefits of our faith.

May we each be diligent in knowing Christ more. It is in knowing and walking with the Truth that all falsehood is put away.

### Discussion questions:

1. What about this sermon did you find interesting?
2. What strategy tempts you to buy things that you do not really want or need?
3. Why do you think people follow false teachers?
4. Paul exhorted them to turn away from false teaching because in Christ they had everything that they needed. When we forget this truth, what else do we trust in to meet our own needs?

5. We have been set apart and made holy by the work of Christ in our lives. How does baptism symbolize what happened at salvation?
6. God has made us alive together with Christ through the forgiveness of our sins. In Christ we have everything that we need. As we begin to truly believe this, how might it affect our thoughts and emotions?
7. It is in knowing and walking with the Truth that all falsehood is put away. How can we be more intentional about guarding against false teachers? How can we come to know Christ more?
8. What do you need to remember from this sermon and our discussion? And what do you think God wants you to do about it? How can we help?