



## Sermon: 18/8/19

### *Live in Him* Colossians 2:6-23

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Last week, I said that Paul needed to persuade the Church in Colossae to receive his letter for he wrote from prison for preaching the gospel to people who had not met him, and there were false teachers in their congregation. He said that he was commissioned to bring people to Christ and bring them to maturity in Christ.

Now, he starts to bring correction. It takes the form of warning lest they go astray from the good beginning they had made. He reminds them that they received Christ Jesus as Lord. They not just accepted Jesus. They had not just accepted Jesus Christ. They had accepted Jesus Christ as Lord.

Jesus is the name of the man. If we just accept Jesus it is a shallow conversion. Our faith is not about an historic interest in a man. Christ means the anointed one. This is the one God sent to meet our needs as the rescuer and saviour. They accepted the man Jesus who was anointed with the Holy Spirit as Lord. In English 'Lord' is weak. The Greek word (*kyrios*) was used of an authority figure: a teacher, an employer, a slave-master who had total control over the slave, the emperor (Caesar is Lord meant Caesar had full power). Finally the word was used of God who had absolute authority. The one who the beginning and the end who is in supreme control of the Universe.

The early Christians had a simple creed: Jesus is Lord. What word might we use: Teacher, Boss, dictator, sovereign, ruler, commander-in-chief? Commander-in-chief has ultimate control of work, leisure, everything of life is under control of the commander-in-chief. When you were converted you said, Jesus I surrender the right to run my life as I wish. You are not accepting Christ for what he will do for you, but it is what you are to do for him. If he's not Lord of all, he's not Lord at all.

Is that what you have done? Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Commander-in-Chief?

Paul continues by writing they and we should live in him – literally walk about in Him. Imagine a circle on the ground you can walk about within that circle. To step outside that circle of Christ's lordship is trespassing outside the rule of Christ. If you accept Christ as Lord then everything you do has to be able to be in the circle of Christ. You walk about with him, you share everything with him.

This is not narrow-minded - he is creator of the universe as well as our redeemer. There is room for tremendous development within the circle: You can grow down – deepen your roots; you can be built up, you can grow out and be made strong.

You can grow down - let your roots go down deeper and deeper. What are roots for? To draw nourishment and to provide stability. Get your roots down into Christ. You can be built up. This is a building metaphor. As you mature in Christ you are built up. Then think of the sapling growing to be the trunk of a tree: it grows bigger and stronger – so we are to grow strong in the faith you are taught of Jesus. Jesus wants us to have gone deep, high and strong, so we have the full life of Christ living in us.

Paul tells us three more things about Christ:

1. In verse 9, Paul affirms that the fullness of God dwells in Christ bodily. All of God is in Christ. Not just a flavour, not just a god-like quality but all of God. And we who are in Christ by faith in him, have been given fullness in Christ. We are filled up with what he wants for us of himself. There is no lack within the circle of living in Christ! Jesus Christ is God.

2. The fullness of the deity lives in bodily form in Christ. Did you notice, he wrote lives not lived! Paul is telling us that the Risen Christ still lives in a human body. The incarnation was permanent. There is a human being in his resurrection body at the right hand of God the Father in heaven.

3. His authority – He is the Head over every power and authority. Paul meant all spiritual powers as well as earthly rulers. In fact, in the context with the concern about angelic powers and demonic powers it is probably more in his mind than worldly rulers. If Jesus has such authority you don't need to fear lesser powers. And as to prayer, why go to the foreman who you can go to the boss, or the MP when you can go to the PM?

It is a delusion and a lie that outside Christ lies fullness of life, when the one who is the fullness of God takes you into himself and gives you the fullness. What a privileged position! Indeed we should "be overflowing with thanksgiving".

So far he has described the growing into maturity he desires for them and God desires for all his people – but there are dangers! We have already identified the two problems in Colossae as teachers who wanted to draw them back into Jewish Legalism and others who were presenting a Gnostic heresy. Gnosticism was named after knowledge and centred around the idea that there was a hierarchy of angels between God and mankind and you needed to know about those angels and worship them to gain influence and find salvation.

So in verse 8, he writes don't be taken captive by hollow and deceptive philosophies which depend on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. You may remember this reference to basic principles of the world means demonic powers not physics or chemistry – it relates to the Gnostic structures we have referred to already. And in verses 16-23 he is dealing with the demands made on these believers from teachers of the two heresies active amongst that church.

But there are not threats only in Colossae and only in 50AD. In Christ you have everything you need so as soon as anyone says you need Christ plus something else, you know they are wrong.

**Jehovah's Witnesses:** Jesus is the Archangel Michael. But on earth, he was only a man and nothing more. There is no Holy Spirit. Jesus' death did not save us but rather guarantees us a second chance to be saved by good works.

**Mormons:** God Almighty was once a man! They deny the Virgin Birth of Jesus; they believe he was married to both Mary and Martha. Salvation can only be obtained by obedience to Mormon ceremonies and by good works.

**Christian Science:** God is an impersonal principle. Christ is a divine idea, Jesus was a human man. There is no sin, Christ never died and Jesus did not suffer for our sins. It is hard to see how the word 'Christian' can be associated with it!

**Islam:** Jesus was a very great prophet, but second to Muhammad. He is not the son of God; he is not divine. He did not die on the cross, instead, God allowed Judas to look like Jesus and he was crucified instead. Forgiveness of sins is obtained by Allah's grace without a mediator for the Muslim who believes Allah exists and the fundamental doctrines of Islam and follows the commands of Allah given in the Quran.

**New Age:** The New Age Movement is a religious system with two basic beliefs: Evolutionary Godhood and Global Unity. It believes God is impersonal so it is meaningless to think God would make demands of us. On the other hand, it believes humans can evolve into gods. This is a much lower understanding of being a god than the Biblical view. There is no need for salvation but for evolution through realization and acceptance of proper knowledge.

It is easy to see a parallel between the beliefs of Gnosticism and New Age. Both have the idea of salvation or improvement through acquiring secret knowledge. Gnosticism understood the spiritual reality being composed of an array of angelic orders between God and man. Understanding and controlling these angels was vital to salvation. New Age is keen to use spirit guides and angels to assist the individual in her progress towards godhood.

There are philosophies within mainstream Christianity which in more subtle ways deny the position of Christ and certainly what he has done for us. We need to be careful that we are not taken captive by such thinking which leads us out of trusting dependence on Jesus for our salvation and away from his direction of our lives. Then there are secular philosophies which starting from faulty premises will always have faulty outcomes – garbage in garbage out!

Paul says to us today: Don't be taken captive by these things - you have all the fullness of Christ dwelling in you and he has all power and authority.

In Verse 11, he deals with the Judaizers' position that Gentiles needed to become Jews in order to become Christians but in doing so he teaches us so much about what Christ has done for us and what our baptism means. The Covenant which God made with the Hebrew people had a sign - circumcision - the removal of part of a man's body to mark him as devoted to God. The prophets write of uncircumcised hearts and lips making it clear that God was saying it is symbolic of cutting away all that is rebellious and stubborn. Here, Paul says when you believed in Jesus, something happened that cut your sinful nature from you. You were not only able to say Jesus died for me, but also I died with him. I share his death. The sinful self has been cut off from me as surely as His body was killed.

Verse 12: Baptism is not an optional extra. Baptism is the way you start being a Christian. How can you say you are following Christ, if you are not doing the first thing he instructed you to do? Baptism is more than a badge to say I am a Christian. It is more than a symbolic re-enacting of something of which has happened. The important thing is what happens in it! In baptism, the person is lowered into a watery grave. He or she stops breathing, like a corpse the body is being buried - buried with Jesus. Then the person is raised out of the water identifying with Christ's resurrection.

Paul wrote that we are buried with Christ in baptism and raised with him through our faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead. It is an identification with what Christ has done for us.

He continues, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins. None of the religions, cults, heresies or philosophies offer anything like that.

In verse 14, Paul tells us that the demands of the Law of Moses as a means of salvation have been set aside by Jesus' death on the cross. This deals with the Judaisers' demands. In verse 15, he tells us that Christ disarmed the spiritual powers and triumphed over them by the cross – this dealt with the Gnostic teachers' claims.

We may not be troubled by either of these particular teachings but we need to know that our salvation is not earned by keeping the Law – any law - but by trust in Christ as saviour. And we are not subject to the oppression of spiritual forces – we are set free by Jesus who broke their overwhelming power.

Just as you accepted Jesus Christ as Lord, continue to live – to walk about – in him. Amen.