

# (Colossians) Part Three - Col 1:21-23; 2:6-15

by Douglas Moo

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*Douglas Moo's sermon emphasizes the sufficiency of Christ and the importance of living faithfully in Him while addressing false teachings in Colossae.*

**Duration:** 58:22

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Romans 3:28, Colossians 1:21-23, Colossians 2:6-7, Hebrews 6:4-6, Hebrews 10:26-27, James 2:14-26

**Topics:** "Exposition"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by acknowledging that they will not be able to cover the entire book of Colossians but will focus on selected passages. They emphasize that speech is not just about communicating truth but also about accomplishing something. The speaker then delves into the concept of being 'in Christ,' explaining that once we know Jesus and belong to him, our lives are bound up with him and he becomes the atmosphere in which we live. They also address the tension between the perseverance of the saints and warning passages in Scripture, expressing the need to effectively explain the meaning of these passages.

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## Transcript

Good morning. I neglected to make one note of introduction yesterday, which some of you might be wondering about, and it might save time to handle this as a group. You probably have guessed by now, if you're especially intuitive, that I'm not Asian.

And you may wonder where this peculiar name of mine came from. It's actually a Norwegian name and background. My great-grandfather, born in Norway, had the nice, normal name of Erikson.

When he emigrated into the United States, however, he was encouraged to change his name, which was a very common thing in the great days of immigration in the U.S. All these Scandinavian Eriksons emigrating into the U.S., you know, you're going to get lost in the shuffle, and no one will know you from all these other Eriksons. You might think about changing your name. So to the regret of all his descendants, my great-grandfather decided to take the name of the village he was from in Norway, M-O-O, pronounced Moo, and written as M-O-O, because that's what it sounded like.

And you can imagine it's been interesting to be raised with this name. One advantage is that we knew that our prospective daughters-in-law really loved our sons, that if they were willing to go through with a

ceremony in which they would have to take this name. But, yeah, that's the history of the name.

And not untypical in the United States. A lot of that name-changing went on in the great days of immigration. Thank you for your kind attention last night.

It's been a joy already to get to know some of you and see just where God has brought you in ministry. And I trust again that our time in the Word will be profitable this morning as we move on in Colossians. Obviously, again, because of the limitations of time, we are having to pick and choose certain passages in Colossians to focus our attention on.

But before we jump into 2.6 and following, let me just make a couple of comments about what sort of comes in between the texts we're looking at. As I suggested last night, there is a sense in which chapter 1, verses 3 all the way through verse 23, stands as something of a unit bracketed by this emphasis on the hope that is ours in the gospel. As you will well know, I'm sure, after introducing the Son in verse 13, Paul develops this idea first in terms of the Son and then in terms of the redemption that we experience.

And so the themes of verses 13 and 14 are elaborated respectively in 1.15-20, as Paul turns to talk about the Son and who this Son is. And then in verses 21-23, in terms of the redemption, the forgiveness of sins that we who know the Son experience. Again, it would certainly repay our time to look carefully at this wonderful passage about Jesus Christ, the one who is Lord of both creation and new creation, the theme of verses 15-20 we need to push on.

In 1.24-2.5, Paul becomes much more personal. Here the first person singular dominates as Paul reflects on his own ministry, some of the things that motivates him and some of the focal points of his preaching. Some of the themes that we've already begun to see in Colossians continue here.

So there is an attention to the Word of God, verse 25, Paul's sense that he is a servant commissioned by God to present the Word of God in its fullness. The language of fullness or fulfill is some key languages we're going to see in Colossians, and we have it here again. Once again, there is great emphasis on Christology.

Here we find this wonderful summary of the overwhelming significance and sufficiency of Christ in 2.3. Christ is the one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And we just might note the language of wisdom and knowledge again that we saw last night as well. The Colossian Christians, as we will see this morning in the passage that is our focal point, the Colossian Christians are being tempted by these false teachers to begin looking for knowledge elsewhere, to add to what they have in Christ by taking on board some sort of philosophy that was current at the time.

Paul's point is the obvious one here. In Christ, you have all wisdom and knowledge. You need go nowhere else to discover all you need to know about the spiritual life, about the world we live in, and about how to authentically lead lives pleasing to God.

Well, that brings us to 2.6 through 15. As I suggested last night, 2.6 to 7 is in many ways I think the sort of central text in the letter. I hope this is a little more visible.

I did redo the presentation so that it might appear a little bit more present for us. That does help a little bit. Thank you.

I would be tempted, I think, if I were preaching a series on Colossians, perhaps to handle 2.6 to 7. Sorry, Rachel, I forget I was straying from the microphone. I would be tempted to handle 2.6 to 7 perhaps as a sermon in its own right. I think the text is significant enough.

It's central enough to what's going on in Colossians. And there is so much material in 2.6 through 15, I suspect that at least for my sort of pattern of preaching, I might want to do that. And so let's focus on 2.6 to 7 first, if we might.

I'll come back to this in a moment. Again, we have one of these places in which Paul sort of almost gives us our preaching outline. We don't have to work very hard here.

What does it mean to continue to live in Christ? How does that happen? What are the means by which we are going to be able to accomplish that? Again, Paul sort of uses four verbs to draw out what it means to live our lives faithfully in Christ. It means that we'll be rooted in Christ. We will be built up in Christ.

So Paul moves from the botanical metaphor to the construction metaphor. Paul loves to shift his metaphors almost in midstream. And certainly we have that here.

Third, strengthened in the faith as you were taught. This is, I think, the way both the NIV, for instance, and the ESV take the language here. But you will find some versions that translate established by your faith.

It's an issue in the Greek here. The idea could go either way. In other words, Paul could be talking about our believing as the means by which we become established.

Certainly a very valid, thoroughly biblical point. But the NIV and the ESV I think probably have it right here in suggesting that in this case, faith is being used as it is used a few times in the NT, not in the subjective sense of our believing, but in the more objective sense of what it is we believe. So it's not so much our believing, but that in which we believe.

The faith, the tradition about Christ, the faithful proclamation of Jesus, as that is already in Paul's day being handed on from generation to generation, as it were. I think that's probably the sense here. It fits so well in terms of what's going on in Colossians.

So we continue to live our lives in Christ or to walk in him, is the metaphor, by finding ourselves firmly established in the faith as it has been taught to us. If I were to ask you to write down the four key ingredients for living a life faithfully in Christ, I wonder if thankfulness would be on that list. In other words, the fourth item here is a place where, once again, I think we might be sort of paused.

I think we can start using that as a verb these days, even in a transitive sense, granted the way things have changed over the years with these remote control devices we use. We would be sort of brought to a pause at this point and just ponder, why thankfulness? Why thanksgiving? You might remember that was also something Paul talks about in our text last night when he was talking about how we please God, lead a life worthy of him, you remember? And the fourth item was giving thanks to the Father. This note appears two or three other times in Colossians.

It's a rather distinctive minor theme in the letter, but worth noting, perhaps, reminding ourselves that sometimes we are encouraged in our faithfulness to Christ by the reminder of what he has done for us already, stimulating this attitude of humble thanksgiving to God for what he has given us. So interesting that this makes the list, as it were, for Paul here. Living our lives faithfully in Christ includes this matter of

being thankful to the Father for all he has done.

Let me just move back now to our larger text. And, again, what I'm doing here is just observing certain patterns, repetitions, that I think may deserve our attention as we think about understanding, preaching, applying this passage. First, I've underlined the in Christ or in him theme.

Here we have a little prepositional phrase that would never sort of appear as a main point if we were doing a kind of structural outline of this passage or, indeed, any passage. And yet it is a vital theme in the theology of Paul. A theme that theologians have struggled over the decades to sort of pin down.

And maybe that's the problem. It's a phrase that Paul uses in a way that resists being pinned down to some neat, simple formula. It reminds us that, as Christians, we live in the sphere of Christ.

He is everything. And Paul hammers this theme in our text for obvious reasons. In him, we have all that we need for our spiritual success.

Now, interestingly, Paul shifts a bit from the in Christ to the with Christ theme. And I've used double underlining to highlight this focus that begins particularly in verses 11 and following, but becomes especially explicit in verses 13 and 14. In Christ is the way Paul likes to talk about what it means to be a Christian in the broadest possible sense.

Again, it means to be a person who, again, lives in this metaphorical sphere created by Christ. He is the touch point of everything we do, of who we are in its most fundamental way. The with Christ language Paul typically uses with verbs.

And often directing our attention, as this text I think does, back to the beginnings of our Christian experience. We talk about being converted. We talk about coming to Christ.

All these things are very appropriate ways to speak about the sort of origin of our Christian experience. But more fundamentally, in a certain sense, is God's decision to see us as people in Christ and thus to experience with Christ what he has won for us. That will be a theme, again, that we'll see Paul developing in verses 13 and following.

Then finally, if I might just note one other obvious point. And here again, for me, is the center of our passage and the hinge on which it all rests. And that's the, I think, deliberate play on the language of fullness that we find in verses 9 and 10.

In Christ, all the fullness of deity resides. And then he goes on to say, and in Christ you have that fullness. Here is the center of what Paul is trying to say at this point.

Because everything you can possibly know about God is found in Christ. You who are in Christ experience that fullness. Nothing else to add to what is found in Christ.

The theme of Colossians in this sense, theologically, is the sufficiency of Christ. He is sufficient for all of our spiritual needs, whether that involves our initial conversion, coming to Christ and experiencing the salvation as a gift he gives to us, or whether it means, in this case, the really key focus, our continuing maturation in spiritual matters. We're going to talk about a little bit of the background in Colossians today.

But clearly the people in Colossae are being taught not to omit Christ, not to leave Christ, but to add to Christ. These false teachers, it seems to me, are saying something like, that's wonderful, you've had this

initial experience spiritually in coming to know Jesus Christ. We now want to bring you to a full spiritual experience.

You need to add to Christ this or that or the other thing. And so it is, I think, regularly throughout church history we find Satan operating among his people, among false teachers, not simply to contradict our Christian faith, because that would be so obvious and it wouldn't attract people who had any genuine desire to know or live for Christ. Rather, Satan attacks obliquely by chipping away at the foundation, not by subtraction in this case, but by addition.

Christ himself is the one who exhibits the fullness of God. We are full in him. That's the great central message of our text.

Let me talk a little bit about the false teaching, both from the standpoint of what's going on in Colossae and also from the more practical perspective of what we do with this kind of material in preaching a letter like Colossians. I've given a list here of the rather specific things that we find in Colossians as Paul tries again to reflect a little bit on what that false teaching is. And again, as I said last night, we have to be aware of the fact that on the one hand, it can be helpful to know some of this background in order to sharpen our application.

To know just what the false teaching may have been can enable us to understand better what Paul is trying to say in response. Especially that can be important in maintaining what I would call a careful homiletical balance in the way we present any singular piece of the New Testament or Old Testament for that matter. The point is that in a letter like Colossians, Paul is not writing in a vacuum.

He is not sitting back, feet on his desk, keyboard on his lap, simply sort of reflecting on Christian things in a vague, general way. Paul's letters are pastoral. You're pastors, so you know what that's like.

You know how much of your time is spent putting out fires. You know that often your preaching and teaching has to take a particular form because of the place your people are at. Their needs, their situation, or their imbalance.

I like sometimes to think of some of these letters of the New Testament with the analogy of the teeter-totter. Do you have those here? Do you know what I'm referring to? Playground equipment for children where they're balanced on a central point and children will sit on each end and teeter back and forth, you see. So very often in the New Testament we find churches or pastoral situations where the teeter-totter is like this.

It's become imbalanced. False teaching or misunderstanding have come along. And the balance is out of whack.

So what do our New Testament authors do? Well, they come along and they don't stand on the middle. They jump on this end to get the thing back in a right balance again. Thus the danger in our preaching of drawing final conclusions from any single New Testament letter.

The need in our preaching to maintain what I would call a biblical balance. So, for instance, if I am preaching Galatians. I take that as an example because I finished a commentary on Galatians not long ago.

And it's a particularly good example of the point. Paul has very little in Galatians to say nice about the law. He's very negative about the very law of God throughout.

And if we just sort of preach through Galatians by itself, we might end up leaving our people with the sense of, well, Old Testament law is a bad thing. That saves me a lot of time in my yearly Bible reading. I can just skip all those bits.

Obviously not a good thing for me as a Christian to be involved in. But again, we would of course miss the point that in Galatians, Paul writing to people, putting way too much stress on the law, himself has to put all his emphasis here to write the balances again. So as we preach through biblical books, I think one of the things we need to do is, of course, preach the text in front of us with its emphasis, but also bring reminders occasionally to our people.

You know, this isn't the whole truth of the subject we're talking about. This is an important truth. You need to hear this.

You need to live this out. But let's remember this other side that we have in other passages of scripture as well. Now, I could spend the rest of the morning, and indeed the rest of my time with you, talking about the different theories of exactly what this false teaching in Colossians was.

Scholars debate it. It seems to have some kind of a Jewish element. Paul's going to go on in a passage right after ours to talk about new moons and Sabbaths and circumcision.

It seems to be very speculative. Look at verse 8, hollow and deceptive philosophy. By the way, I like that NIV rendering.

I think it gets the idea well and avoids the problem of people thinking that Paul thought philosophy was a bad thing. I think the right interpretation of what he is saying here is not avoid philosophy, but avoid a certain kind of philosophy, a vain, hollow philosophy that is not in accordance with Christ. So clearly there is a speculative element to whatever this false teaching was.

Clearly there is an element of rules. You can see from the list up here, these false teachers, among other things, were saying, if you really want the full spiritual experience you see, you have to obey these rules.

Christ isn't enough. You've got to add to Christ these sort of ways of doing things. So Colossians 2 is a famous, particularly the end of Colossians 2, appropriately famous text that counteracts that subtle, powerful tendency toward legalism among us.

Paul is not saying that all rules are bad. And here's again where careful balance is needed as we present this to our people. He's not saying all rules are bad.

There are some rules he himself lays down for the churches. But he is saying that if you're trying to find your true spiritual lodestar, if you are trying to find spiritual fulfillment by focusing on rules, you are missing the point. Rules are designed to guide our life in Christ.

They are never to become a substitute for our life in Christ. It's an interesting situation, again, that scholars can't agree. People who have spent a lot of time studying this don't agree on exactly what this false teaching was.

A problem? Yeah, academics would like to be able to pin things down. But in another sense, a benefit. In that, Paul is describing kind of a generic false teaching here that we can find many examples of throughout the history and life of the church.

So how do you handle this kind of a matter in preaching? I have heard sermon series developed by some of my students over the years, in which because they want to be students of the word, because they've been taught by intellectuals like me, I think I've got to do my good job here of setting the context for the letter to the Colossians. So my first sermon on the letter to the Colossians is going to be all about who wrote it, when, to whom, what was the false teaching going on here. What a great way to kill a sermon series dead right at the start.

You could just see people nodding off as you blather on about false teaching and Judaizers and first century heresies. Some of that background may need to be brought in, but I would urge that you bring it in where it becomes appropriate for the text you're dealing with. So it's tied to a point you're making in a sermon rather than standing as sort of a creature in its own right.

Our people don't need those kinds of history lessons. They may need some history in order to fully appreciate what's going on in the word of God, and I don't think we should make apologies for that, but that history has to be attractively and appropriately brought in so that people see the payoff. People see, yeah, I can see how that helps me read Colossians more accurately and how that matches certain things I see going on in my own culture or in the life of the church.

Very important, it seems to me, to focus on those kinds of connections. So if I were preaching through Colossians, just as I said that, I don't think I've ever preached right through the book. I've preached a lot of Colossians, but most churches rightly don't want to hear me too many weeks in a row, so I generally don't get invited for a long series.

There's only so much mood that they can take, and so normally it's a two- or three-week thing where I'm picking texts sort of like I'm doing this week. But if I were to preach through the letter from beginning to end, I would never start with author, date, recipients, background, and so forth. I would try to weave those in where necessary and appropriate throughout the sermon series.

So in our text, again, Paul warns about this false teaching very clearly in verse 8, and the key to this false teaching and our application of Colossians is the last point Paul makes. This teaching is not dependent on Christ. Again, we could talk for a long time about this phrase translated in the NIV, the elemental spiritual forces.

It's one of the most debated phrases in the New Testament, used here, touched on later in verse 20, and then also in Galatians 4. For what it's worth, I think probably Paul is reflecting the typical idea of that day about the basic material elements of the world, earth, fire, water, air. These were the elements of the world as the ancient people understood them, and very often tied into their larger spiritual convictions and beliefs. And we're going to see that one of the issues Paul's very concerned about is these powers and authorities that he talks about, for instance, in verse 15, and also, again, in verse 9. These spiritual beings that the ancients thought dictated their lives.

They were absolute prisoners to these impersonal spiritual forces. And one of the great messages of Colossians is the way in which, in Christ, a victory over those spiritual forces has been won, and we then who are in Christ are no longer subject to the dictating will of these spiritual forces. A message that

resonates very strongly in many parts of our world, where the battles among the spirits is so fundamental to the world view.

I need to move on. In Christ, then, the fullness of the deity lives, verse 9. We have been brought to fullness in him who is the head over every power and authority. And then very interesting shift of metaphor, picking up Old Testament language in verse 11.

In him you were circumcised with the circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ. Now, I'm sure if you're reading other English versions, you'll see some differences here.

And by the way, before I forget to say that, one of the really valuable things that I'm sure you've learned to do in preparing New Testament material to preach or teach is to compare contemporary English versions. These English versions provide a valuable insight into the interpretive options. I've worked on two different Bible translation groups, one that worked with the NLT and then my very significant involvement with the NIV.

And what you find here is a group of scholars who are sort of assessing all the different interpretive options, trying to decide on what the best interpretation is that's going to be put into the translation, but then also perhaps putting in notes significant alternative options. We on the NIV translation group spent a lot of time thinking about what options do we want to put in our footnotes. Sort of like the mother who always puts an apple in her child's lunch, knowing the child will never eat the apple, but feeling much better for having done so.

So we fully realize that virtually no one will ever read these footnotes, but we feel better if they're there. But again, this is one of the values you see of translations. Individual commentators can often be off the wall, myself included.

We have our idiosyncrasies. Yeah, we have editors who read it, but they generally don't do much serious content editing. They let us say whatever we want.

The best commentary is going to have an individualistic slant sometimes. But if you find something in an English translation of the Bible, one of the good, solid translations, or in the footnotes of that Bible, this, in a sense, is an interpretive option that has received an endorsement. It's been through a very careful vetting process, as it were.

And so, again, just to encourage you in your preaching, in your study of the text, regularly compare four or five of the contemporary English versions from the more paraphrastic to the more literal, and then use those in your preaching. Occasionally, I know you'll find this hard to believe, I have to disagree with what's in the NIV. Point being, I lose votes on the committee.

My stubborn, hard-hearted colleagues don't always see things the way I do. And so, as I am preaching from any English version, there are going to be times when I have to go a different way. And for me to be able to say, now, here I think the NLT or the ESV or the NASB has got a better way of getting at the sense of what Paul is saying here, I love to be able to do that so people aren't just hearing me say, this is my idea, but here is a representative English translation that goes the way I think we should go here.

So, a bit of a parenthesis, but an encouragement to use translations effectively, not as a problem, but as a resource, both for your study and for your preaching. All of that brings us back to the end of verse 11. Your

whole self, ruled by the flesh, was put off when you were circumcised by Christ.

And we have a footnote here in the NIV, because circumcised by Christ is one interpretive option here. We are dealing in this case, in the Greek, with the genitive construction, basically equivalent in English to our of, X of Y idea. I'll come back to that in a moment.

But familiar to us again because it surfaces very, very often as a key point of ambiguity in a text. Something of something else is often the way we learn, if we've studied Greek at all, how to sort of bring the genitive into English. Which, if I might just parenthetically say, is not a literal rendering of the Greek at all.

The Greek has no preposition. We in English use a preposition, so it's not a literal rendering of the genitive, it's just sort of one way to render the particular construction. And I say it, whether you have Greek or not, you are going to very frequently run into places in the New Testament where this language occurs, and where it's going to be a little bit uncertain about how we want to understand it.

You know, one of the famous examples is Paul's claim in 2 Corinthians 5, that the love of Christ constrains us. And we think about that, does that mean my love for Christ? Or Christ's love for me? Or both? These are the kinds of, again, phrases that we frequently encounter, and often are going to be matters of decision. So here, the circumcision of Christ.

Is this Christ's act in circumcising us? Or is it a circumcision performed on Christ? Now clearly Paul is dealing with a metaphor here. And is the metaphor Christ stripped flesh off us, just as literal circumcision cuts off a small bit of flesh? So Paul might be saying, when we come to Christ, he cuts off all of our flesh, using flesh in the distinctly Pauline sense of the sinful human tendency, the ruling passion of this world that outside of Christ binds us to sin. Or, again, is he saying, Christ on the cross actually was circumcised himself in a metaphorical way.

He gave up his body. His flesh, in a sense, was stripped away also when he died for us. And that's what Paul is referring to.

I want to comment on that in a moment, but let me just back up on the idea of this genitive, called the genitive in Greek, or again, this of construction in English. I had a fascinating moment of insight. They don't come very often for me, so I treasure those few that I get.

I was talking to a student in my office one day, and I said, remember the famous photograph of Ansel Adams. And it was clear that immediately what my student was thinking of is a photograph taken by Ansel Adams, one like this, for instance, of the Teton Range and Wyoming with the Snake River in the front, one of the more famous Ansel Adams photographs. He's an American photographer.

He's probably familiar over here as well, isn't he, to some extent? Oh, you poor folks. Really. Really.

Wonderful black-and-white photography. Ansel Adams. Look him up.

Look him up. So again, a photograph of Ansel Adams. Well, Ansel Adams is a famous photographer, so of course the student assumed this is what I meant.

But in fact, this is what I meant. The famous photograph of Ansel Adams as the object of the photograph, standing on his station wagon with his big 8-by-10-inch view camera in Yosemite Valley. To me, that was,

again, a moment of insight into how this construction works.

When we use this of construction in English and when we find it in scripture, the way we unpack it depends on sort of the knowledge we bring to the phrase. We just kind of naturally interpret it a certain way depending on our background. And because Ansel Adams is a famous photographer, a photograph of Ansel Adams will communicate to most folks a photograph he took.

But put, let's say, a famous model in the place. Who's a famous model? I don't follow the world of fashion. Who's a famous model over here? Kate Moss.

A photograph of Kate Moss. How would you naturally unpack that, you see? Well, you know who she is. She's a model.

Her photograph's taken all the time. Obviously, it must mean that. So our understanding of these phrases, again, depends on sort of the background, the knowledge, the context we bring to it.

And what I would suggest in this case, then, no surprise probably to you, is that in this case, I think the NIV has got it right here. This is the interpretation most of the commentators go with. Because when we would think of a circumcision of Christ, after Paul has said, you were circumcised, in this context, we're going to think metaphorically, again, of how Christ has circumcised us.

It's, again, a metaphor he's drawing, obviously from his Old Testament and Jewish background. But, again, it's a way of making the point that in our coming to Christ, this sinful self, this propensity to sin, which is born into us as human beings, that's been stripped away by Christ. So it's a text to remind us, again, that not only when we come to Christ do we escape the penalty of sin, we also are set free from the power of sin.

Implication? You don't need to go to the false teachers to lead a thoroughly foundational, successful Christian life. You don't need rules. All you need is to sink yourself more and more deeply in Christ, who has already provided all you need, including rescuing you from this overwhelming, overpowering dominance of sin in your life.

A lot of people, some of them quite sincere in their Christian faith, who are peddling various ways to find success in the Christian life. I find these ideas sometimes helpful, sometimes not, but almost always superficial and incomplete. It's in our rootedness in Christ that we find the answer to our spiritual struggle.

Programs, teachings can help that sometimes, but too often they easily become substitutes for a genuine sinking ourselves in Christ. Jesus' famous imagery of the vine and the branches is what Paul is getting at with his in Christ language. Branches that remain deeply and nourishingly attached to the root and to the tree and growth, sustenance, life takes place there.

I have to be a bit brief now on the rest. I'm sorry for this. Just wanted to note a pattern we find now in verses 11 to 13, a pattern rooted in the gospel itself, the famous text of 1 Corinthians 15.

What does Paul pass on to the Corinthians? That is a first importance that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day. Paul picks up this same sequence very obviously in Romans 6 and also in Colossians 2 here. And interestingly, baptism is related to that.

I am not going to get us into a discussion of baptism, its significance, theological meaning, and relationship to circumcision. That would take us far afield and I'm sure would spark some lively conversation, but we're going to have to defer that at least for now. But the point I would make is that the focus here in the with language is how, as believers, our great victory over sin comes through our identification with Christ.

As I think Paul teaches, all human beings were with Adam in some sense when he sinned, and thus Adam's sin affects every human. So Paul suggests in some sense all of us were with Christ when he died and was buried and was resurrected. And the benefits that he gains from those experiences are ours because we are in Christ.

Again, Paul wants to take us back to the foundational work of God for us. It rests not on my believing, it rests on who I am in Christ, that I access by believing, but it doesn't rest on me. My success in the spiritual life does not rest on how well I have faith.

It rests on the way my faith keeps me attached to the one who has already provided everything I need. At the end of our text, Paul introduces another beautiful image about forgiveness of sin, canceling the charge of our legal indebtedness, nailing it to the cross, and at least I find it difficult not to break forth in song at this point with the wonderful language of the hymn we all know. Christ has disarmed the powers and authorities, making a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Here again is where our knowledge of New Testament background can shed really useful light on the text. This language of triumphing over them is technical language from Paul's Greco-Roman world. When a Roman general would have a successful military campaign out in the provinces somewhere, that general would be honored with a triumph, as it was called by the Romans.

He would mass his troops on the outskirts of Rome, and then he would march into Rome in a chariot with people honoring him, and in his train behind him would come slaves he had captured in the latest military campaign. That's the language Paul uses here to, in a sense, create a picture for these people living in the Roman Empire about what Christ has done to the spiritual powers. Christ is compared to the victorious, conquering general, the great military victor, who in his train we find those who have now been captured and are enslaved to him.

All of these powers and authorities that are so significant in the lives of the Colossians, and whom the false teachers seem to be saying, yeah, you've got to pay attention to Christ, but don't forget these other spiritual powers out there. You've got to make sure you've got them covered as well. Paul's point, they are helpless slaves of Christ.

He has gained the victory over them. We celebrate that victory with him. I'm sorry, I've left only about five minutes for questions.

I apologize. Questions on this text or points that we've raised here? Daniel. With that, didn't you say about the two, circumcised by Christ or circumcision of Christ, is it possible it could be both? It's possible.

It's possible. I tend to be a little leery of both and solutions. Sometimes, yeah, Vaughn's, sorry.

I just realized. Vaughn is absolutely right. Very often it is a both and.

But usually in communication, I think the way you use English, generally you mean one thing by what you're saying. There are times when you're going to be clever and deliberately try to say two different things by sort of choosing a phrase that can go both ways. Normally in communication, one means one thing.

So my principle of interpretation is, if there is good reason in the text to find both ideas, yes. But if not, then I tend to fear, not in Vaughn's case, obviously, but for some, that the both and is simply an easy way out of not thinking hard enough about a thing. Well, here's view A, here's view B. They both seem to make a bit of sense.

I don't have time to sort them out, so I'll say it's both. Again, yes, at times that can be the case. But in my experience, normally, no.

Authors, speakers tend to mean one thing by what they're saying. And they might use a phrase that's ambiguous to the hearers, but generally they have one thing in mind, and that's what we should be after. So it's possible that Paul can mean both Christ being circumcised and his circumcising us, but I doubt it.

That's right, if there are good textual reasons for it. So, for instance, in the Gospel of John, especially, there is very good reason to see a lot of his images as carrying more than one sort of metaphorical weight. And there we would do a disservice to the text by saying, it's got to be this only.

That's the way he writes. It is, yeah. It is a bit of a different style.

Yes, certainly. Thank you, it's very helpful. Can I make a comment? Sure.

You can comment on it. Many churches have experienced, for want of a better word, charismatic spirits. And many of us pastors are exposed to people saying, you know, we haven't, you know, the church down the road, they've got a bit more than what you have.

You're just teaching the Bible for us to know Christ. My observation is we're not good at teaching about our union with Christ in Christ. The whole idea that we died with Christ, we're alive.

We raised with Christ. You know, we live in glory as we get here in Colossians. And I do wonder whether we've been weak in that, which is their displacement to those who do it for them.

Does that make sense? Yes, I think that's a possible thing to happen. One of the things I would say is, first of all, let's not let certain segments of the church co-opt the adjective charismatic. Let's all own that phrase.

We all should be charismatics, certainly. I want to be very careful in saying this because I hold a very, I think, moderate mediating view on some of these matters of the charismatic movement. But having been in a charismatic movement myself, as I mentioned last night, one of the things one has to worry about in the charismatic movement is a tendency to substitute ever more spectacular experiences for the rootedness in Christ, which can sometimes seem, oh, that's a little boring, old school.

I want something new. I want something interesting. I want something more stimulating.

So on the one hand, while we want to embrace the excitement, the enthusiasm that every good charismatic church should have, we find, I think, in Colossians and elsewhere in the NT, a deep concern to help us maintain those roots, those foundations, and the objective work of Christ for us. Certainly that's

what Colossians is about, it seems to me. People are slathering for their coffee, so I better not go too long here.

Yeah, one more. It's difficult to see teaching that in Christ stuff. It just seems too theologically abstract.

Yeah. This is where I pass the torch to all of you. I am not good with word pictures, metaphors, illustrations, as I said.

I think that's one of the most important callings of the pastor, the teacher, the preacher, is taking good theological truth and packaging it in a way that's going to draw a real connection with the group of people you have come to know and love. It's absolutely critical because, yeah, if we go into the pulpit and start doing theology in the sense some people understand it, that's not going to go very far. But if we bring a thorough theological understanding to our people by means of effective word pictures and illustrations, then we've done a wonderful service for them.

Yes. When you said seeking deeper into Christ, but it's a practical way of working, then it takes us back to the four ingredients that we make. We do practically each time.

Yes, yeah, that's true. We could very usefully go right back there to where Paul sort of spells that out in certain ways. Yeah, very good point.

I just have a question about those four ingredients. Yes. Whether they're four distinctive things or whether they're some form of parallelism to describe them, all that sort of thing.

I think the first two are sort of two different metaphors getting at basically the same thing, rooted and founded. We think of building a building on a foundation. We think of rooting a plant, a tree in the ground.

Very similar ideas. So in that sense, yes, they are getting at a similar thing. Established in the faith, depending on how broadly we want to take that.

It could relate to those as well, but could be sort of a separate thing in terms of faithful teaching, the faith, continued understanding of what that faith is, and then, of course, the thankfulness sort of moves in a bit of a different direction from that. So, yeah, in a sense, I would agree. We don't need to see these as four watertight, separate things.

I think our time is up, I believe. So I think we need to move on to our break now. Is that right?

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