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## Made Us Alive Colossians 2:9-13

**Intro:** The Colossian church is being influenced, wooed even, by false teachers promoting false doctrines that, if given heed to, would draw the Colossian believers away from both the simplicity and truth of the gospel. Paul is writing this letter to prevent this falling away from happening and, as a loving Apostle writing to Christians he has never met, his approach to this dangerous scenario is to 1<sup>st</sup>) inform and affirm all that these believers have already received in Christ and 2<sup>nd</sup>) to contrast the utter failings of this new doctrine by direct comparison. Paul has declared in poetic terms exactly Who Jesus Christ is (1:15-19) and all that He has accomplished for them and in them. Paul has bared his heart to this congregation and informed them of the great spiritual conflict he's been engaged in on their behalf and his great confidence and rejoicing in their good order and the steadfastness of their faith in Christ (5).

As was noted in our last study, v8 is the first clue that this Colossian church faces an outside danger. It is Paul's first warning to them against this outside threat and he classifies it as a hollow and deceptive philosophy. He classifies it as such because this particular belief system depends solely on human tradition, not on divine revelation as does the gospel. It's also dependent on the basic principles of the world, meaning it's of the world, derived from the same material world that was created by Christ but is now alienated from God and in need of redemption and reconciling. The final nail in the coffin of this hollow philosophy was that it was not dependent on Jesus Christ. It was this false teaching that Paul warns them not to be cheated by; and he's about to give them a wonderful reason not to be...

9- To counter the attraction of this tantalizing philosophy, Paul reiterates what he said about Jesus in 1:19, that He is the fullness of God! In the OT, fullness refers to God's presence (Isa 6:3) and the basic affirmation of Christianity is that God was fully present in the historical Jesus. Thus, this is a dramatic, air-tight declaration of the full Deity of Christ. Paul uses the Greek *theotes* (Godhead) as opposed to the similar, but lesser word *theiotes*, which merely refers to the attributes of deity. As such, Paul distinguishes Christ from the hierarchy intermediate and angelic beings who

possess dashes of divine attributes. Jesus isn't one among many manifestations of God, He's the whole thing!

And not just that; Paul says that all the fullness of the absolute Godhead dwells in Jesus and it dwells in Him bodily. God has made Himself known in an actual person, a human being Who sums up the reality of God in human terms. The essence of God, that which makes Him God, is fully present in Christ. The term bodily can also be translated as actually or solid reality. The Reality of the indwelling of God in Jesus the man isn't a shadow reality or, in the modern vernacular, a virtual reality. It is something solid, genuine and true. He is uniquely God's presence and His very self and not just a second, different Deity. But, unlike [1:19](#), which was couched in the past tense, this fullness is spoken of here in the present tense. The fullness of God is still to be found in the risen and ascended Lord and this spiritual reality has direct and current ramifications for the Colossian believers!

**10-** Paul here reveals why a hollow philosophy that is not according to (dependent on) Christ is so problematic – because it is only in Christ that believers are brought to spiritual fullness! Paul tells them that they are complete in Christ and this can only be true because Jesus is truly and fully God. In fact, it is out of Christ's fullness that the Colossians have themselves been filled, or made complete. If Jesus were not God, we couldn't be complete in Him but Paul declares that believers are complete, we are filled. The verb tense expresses a past action with present consequences so it is describing an existing state of affairs. But what exactly is this completeness in reference to?

The believer's completeness is directly related to the fullness of the Godhead existing Christ. As all the fullness of the deity resides in Christ; believers, who are in Christ, are filled to the full measure with all the fullness of God, as Paul says in [Eph 3:19](#). Of course, this doesn't mean we become Deity but it does mean is that in Christ, and in Christ alone, God has decisively and exhaustively revealed Himself and all that we can know or experience of God is therefore found in our relationship with Him. For those who are in Christ, Christ is also in them, filling all their spiritual needs and satisfying all their deepest longings.

The immediate benefit of this glorious news for the Colossians would be that once they realize that they are already complete or filled in Christ, they

would now have no interest in listening to the tantalizing tales of false teachers or of pursuing any of the false promises of a higher spirituality presented by them. Anything that says we are not complete in Christ also takes away from the deity of Jesus. If all the fullness of God dwells in Christ and as believers, we are united to Christ in a faith-relationship, then we are also finally and fully complete in Him. This is a fact to be enjoyed not a status to be achieved. In this passage, Paul delivers the true and lasting antidote for all false teaching.

Why follow empty philosophy when we have all fullness in Christ? This would be like turning away from the satisfying waters of a clear mountain stream to drink from the dirty cisterns of the world. The fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ and those in whom Christ dwells, shares that fullness. When a person is born again into the family of God, they're born complete in Christ. Subsequent spiritual growth is not by addition, but by nutrition. We grow spiritually from the inside out. Nothing need be added to Christ because He's already the very fullness of God. It's this fullness of Christ and our connection with Him that reveals all other philosophies and traditions as being unnecessary.

Paul closes out the verse by reminding the Colossians that this same Jesus that they trust in, that they are complete in, this Christ, Himself the fullness of God, the full Satisfier of human need, is also the head – both source and Lord – of all cosmic rulers and authorities. Those who know Him have nothing to fear from any other power, celestial or terrestrial.

**11-** The Colossians had not only been made complete in Christ, they've also received a divine circumcision in Him. Most of these Colossian Christians were Gentiles who had never been physically circumcised. It's not clear whether circumcision was being advocated to them by these false teachers as being necessary for salvation or just as a desirable option. Paul's not as adamant in his condemnation of this subject as he is with the Galatians so it's likely that it was presented as a possible way to enhance one's standing with God or as a way to a deeper spiritual experience. Either way, Paul sees it, as always, as a threat to the work that Christ has done.

By contrast, Paul assures them that they were indeed circumcised in a spiritual sense (made without hands) which is even more important and more spiritually beneficial than physical circumcision. Physical circumcision

was instituted by God to be a sign of the covenant between Him and the people of Israel. But even as early as the Pentateuch, it was being used as a metaphor for a greater reality, Moses himself calling for a circumcision of the heart in [Dt 10:16](#) and [30:6](#). This same metaphor appears in several other OT passages with the same application ([Jer 4:4](#); [Ez 44:7, 9](#)). It's clear from all these passages that, while physical circumcision was important, it was the spiritual circumcision – a circumcision of the heart – that identifies a person as truly belonging to the people of God.

Paul takes up this OT concept and applies it directly to the reality of these Gentile believers. A circumcision made without hands refers to something done by God as opposed to something done by human hands. As such, it stood in direct opposition to the external rite which Judaism was infamous for in the ancient world. Literal circumcision was a minor operation that removed a small portion of flesh, but it had major significance for Jews as the sign of obedience to God's covenant. To them, it meant one was incorporated into the people of God and a beneficiary of the covenant promises to Abraham.

For most Jews in Paul's day, it had become the fundamental identity badge for membership in God's people but from Paul's radical perspective, it had become little more than a tribal brand. In [Rom 2:25-29](#) he argues that, though it is the ground of Jewish confidence, it is a meaningless sign unless it signifies a cleansed heart, and he then goes on to argue that the cleansed heart can only come from Christ. True circumcision has nothing to do with the slicing off of a piece of flesh from the body, it is something related to Christ and accomplished by God's Spirit.

But Paul doesn't just say they've been spiritually circumcised, he tells them what it means. It involves the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh. Spiritual circumcision refers to the putting off of the old man, the old nature of sin. The Greek word for putting off is a double compound that denotes stripping off and casting away. The imagery is that of discarding or being divested of a piece of filthy clothing. Paul is clearly using circumcision as a metaphor for the transition from the old life to the new and the verb tense he uses refers to a definite historical fact. It was through their conversion, the inward circumcision of the heart, by which they entered into the blessings of the New Covenant.

Paul then goes on to explain how this spiritual circumcision was accomplished: by the circumcision of Christ. This is not a referring to Christ's circumcision on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after His birth but to His own death. In this instance, circumcision is being used as a metaphor for a violent death in which His whole physical body was stripped away when He died on the cross. It is in and with Christ's own death that believers are themselves brought from death to life; to die to their old life and live to a new one.

**12-** Seemingly, as confirmation that Paul is referring to the death of Christ at the end of vs **11**, he goes on to state that not only have believers been spiritually circumcised in Christ, they have also been both spiritually buried and raised with Him in believer's baptism. In **I Cor 15:3-4**, Paul declares that the basic message of the gospel is that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried and that He rose again the third day. Then in **Rom 6**, he teaches that it is through identification with these 3 key redemptive-historical events that Christians have been set free from sin: they have died with Christ (**8**), they have been buried with Him (**4**) and they'll be united with Him in a resurrection like His (**5b**). Plus, it's in conjunction with baptism that believers are identified with these events (**3,4**). In our text, it is also through baptism that believers are buried with Him and raised with Him. All that's missing from the sequence is dying with Christ, which is found at the end of v **11**.

Paul's telling these Gentile Christians that they will find their true circumcision in their baptism. Christians don't need to be circumcised – they need to be baptized. Sincere baptism *reveals* that the true circumcision of the heart has taken place. But let's be clear here: NT baptism *answers* OT circumcision, but it doesn't illustrate it. Baptism does illustrate our identification with the death and resurrection of Christ. As we're immersed under the water, we're buried in the likeness of His death; as we're raised up out of the water, we're raised in the likeness of His resurrection. It's almost as if Paul is saying, "Circumcision isn't important; what is important is the spiritual cutting away of the flesh that Jesus performs in the life of every believer. If you want a ceremony to mark this spiritual transformation in your life, look to your baptism, not to circumcision."

Again, we must be careful here. Because Paul makes a connection between circumcision and baptism, some theologians (especially Reformed) say that just as babies were circumcised, so babies should also be baptized. But this idea presses Paul's analogy too far; it ignores the clear intention of the

context and neglects the many examples of baptism shown in the Book of Acts. Furthermore, it reveals a gross misunderstanding of the biblical purpose of baptism. Paul never says circumcision and baptism are the same thing, but that circumcision is unnecessary for salvation because we are identified with Christ and we are physically baptized to convey that spiritual reality.

Paul's final statement in v12 demonstrates that he understood that the power of regeneration, of new birth in Christ, was not found in baptism or received through the act of baptism. Nowhere does the Bible ever intimate or declare that baptism is necessary for salvation. It everywhere and always declares that baptism is merely a sign of salvation.

Our salvation comes through faith in the working of God – it was through God's power that Jesus was raised from the dead and it is through God's power that we are born again and raised up unto new life. Baptism is a sign of our union with Christ and our transfer into His kingdom, but that kingdom life must be lived out by faith or it is meaningless. As such, baptism is both an assurance of belonging to God and a challenge to live for Him.

**13-** Paul has been explaining to the Colossians all that they have received in Christ: spiritual circumcision, believer's baptism and now, new life in Christ. But, before he reveals to them the glories they have in Christ, he reminds them of what they were before they met Christ – they were spiritually dead; dead to God, lacking the spiritual awareness and hope of eternal life that comes from knowing God. Their spiritual death was revealed in 2 ways: 1<sup>st</sup>) trespasses: a word which refers to the breaking of God's moral law, created a divide between them and their Creator. As Gentiles, they didn't have the Law of Moses, but their failure to keep their own standards, which reflect the universal aspect of the human condition, counted against them in much the same way. 2<sup>nd</sup>) as uncircumcised Gentiles, they were outside the covenant relationship with God and so hadn't received any of the benefits of knowing God the Jews had enjoyed.

This, of course, is the condition of every person, Jew or Gentile, before they are raised to new life with Christ through faith in the working of God. Before we have new life, we are dead. The Bible has many descriptions of lost humanity apart from Jesus Christ and this is one of the strongest. A sick person may need a doctor but a dead person needs a Savior. A trespass is a specific kind of sin: the overstepping of a boundary. We're dead because

we've overstepped God's boundaries in our sin and rebellion.

But now, if you know Christ as your Savior, like these Colossian believers, then all of that is in the past! Paul declares that God has made them alive, bringing hope and the presence of Christ, the Giver of eternal life. Of course, this is not just something that applies to the Colossians. It is the linchpin of Christian faith. On the cross, Jesus has done away with the demands of the Law and brought forgiveness to all who put their trust in Him. We are not just made alive but we are made alive together with Him. Charles Spurgeon described this truth this way, "It is true that He gave us life from the dead. He gave us pardon of sin; He gave us imputed righteousness. These are all precious things, but you see we are not content with them; we have received Christ Himself. The Son of God has been poured out into us and we have received Him, and appropriated Him."

We can't make ourselves alive, a dead man can do nothing to change his circumstances. But, God can make us alive together with Christ. If He can raise Jesus from the dead then He can breathe new life into dead sinners. Not only were we made alive with Jesus Christ, we could never be made alive apart from Jesus Christ. It is God's forgiveness in Christ that gives new life. Paul is acutely aware that God didn't simply forgive believing Gentiles with their long history of sinfulness and idolatry, but God also forgave believing Jews with their long history of rebellion and sinfulness. The word translated forgiven is the Greek word *charizomai* – a verb form of the ancient Greek word *charis* (grace). Paul makes it abundantly clear that we are forgiven by God's grace and by God's grace alone.

There are a couple more exciting things that God has accomplished for us through the work of Christ on the cross but time requires us to put them off until our next study.

But, returning to the subject of circumcision, some may wonder that if circumcision is unnecessary for believers, why did Paul insist that Timothy be circumcised before he allowed him to accompany him on his missionary journey? Well, I assure you it wasn't to effect his salvation or to enhance Timothy's standing before God. It was solely for the purpose of improving Timothy's testimony and ensuring his effectiveness as a fellow evangelist with Paul. Timothy's mother was a Jew, which made Timothy a Jew; but his father was a Greek, which meant Timothy had never been circumcised. So,

if he was going to help Paul in his ministry to the Jews of Asia and Europe, he must first become fully Jewish to improve his effectiveness in this ministry.

We have the same thing with one of the missionary families we support. Robert Walter and his family are Gentiles through and through, but their mission outreach is to the Jewish community in the New York City area. So, in order to improve their effectiveness with that community, they have adopted a completely kosher lifestyle, not because they think it makes them better Christians but because they know it will make them better ambassadors for Christ. I guess the question for me and the rest of Grace Chapel is, "What are we willing to surrender in order to make us better ambassadors for Christ?" Yes, we have great liberty in Christ, but we also have a great responsibility to carry the truth of the gospel to those who are still dead in their trespasses and sins. What liberties are we willing to forgo to enhance our testimony and improve our outreach? 😊