

Complete in Christ – Don't Be Judged

Colossians 2:11-17 ¹¹ *In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³ And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, ¹⁴ having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵ Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. ¹⁶ So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, ¹⁷ which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.*

The most important thing that Jesus said on the cross was “It is finished”. For 2000 years since that day, false religion and cults have been answering back, “No, it isn’t”. The heart of Biblical religion is that Jesus Christ, as the Supreme Saviour, purchased for us a salvation that we do not need to finish off. It is finished. It is enough. It is *sufficient*.

Biblical religion has maintained that if you trust Christ by faith, then He graciously gives you His completed work on the cross. He applies it to you, and there is nothing to be added to it.

False sects or cults posing as churches have always said they believe in the work of Christ in the cross, but they believe something more needs to be done. They will never deny that Christ said, “It is finished”, but they maintain that in order for Christ's work to really have its effect on you, you must do certain things.

Cults tell us that Jesus actually only died for Adam's sins, and it is by our works and keeping of the law that we make it to heaven. Likewise, we must be baptised by them, tithe, abstain from certain substances or meals, and do various works to obtain the highest kind of salvation.

Thousands of sects identify themselves as sects or cults by taking something away from Christ, and putting it on man.

When the church was very young, the 'add-on' to faith in Christ was circumcision. Circumcision might not mean much to you today, but to early Christians, it was so mixed in with the Jewishness of the early church that many took it as a means of being saved. Salvation was of the Jews. The Bible came from the Jews. The Law of God came with the Jews. The Messiah was a Jew. The apostles were Jews. The first and central church was in Jerusalem. The way someone aligned themselves with the Jews was through circumcision. Since salvation was of the Jews, and circumcision was the sign of aligning yourself to the Jews, many taught that you needed to be physically circumcised to be truly saved.

This was the earliest form of *legalism* – of ‘Jesus-plus’. If you have read the book of Galatians, you will know that Paul regarded this as a threat to the Gospel itself. He wrote,

Galatians 1:6-7 *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.*

The whole book of Galatians involves Paul telling them that the grace of God in salvation does not need human works to complete it, or finish it.

The same kind of thing was happening in the city of Colosse. There you would find, mixed in with the teachings of early Gnosticism, a type of Jewish legalism. Like the false teachers afflicting the churches in Galatia, they were telling the Christians that they needed certain extra works of the law to be truly saved. They needed to be circumcised. They needed to avoid certain foods. They needed to observe certain days. In other words, they were saying that Christ's work is not complete in itself.

The Law must be kept as well.

In this section, Paul shows how Christ is sufficient in salvation. He shows how you do not need anything else to save you, if Christ has saved you. He shows why you do not need baptism, or the Eucharist, or penance, or Sabbath observance, or special diets, or Jewish worship or anything else to save you, if Christ has saved you. You are complete in Him, and your salvation is complete in Him. It is finished.

So what Paul does is take the thing which all the legalists called for – circumcision - and use it as a metaphor for what Christ has done for us on the cross. He is going to use circumcision as another word for salvation. He attacks the legalists head-on, and says, “*You say they must be circumcised? I'll give you circumcision.*” He says in verse 11, “*in Him **you were** – past tense- circumcised. This was not the physical circumcision with human hands, it was one **without hands***” – in other words, it was done by Christ. He is saying, you have been spiritually circumcised. Physical circumcision was the cutting of a small amount of human flesh. Spiritual circumcision is stripping off **the body of the sins of the flesh**. Your whole sinful past is stripped away permanently, and you are made into one of God's New Covenant people. That's Christ's circumcision: He cuts away the whole old nature that would condemn you and disposes of it.

How complete is this spiritual circumcision? Is it really a final complete, sufficient salvation?

The Bible tells us by explaining what Christ did in three ways.

1. He completely buried your old life (vs12-13)

Verse 12 tells us this: “*buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.*” ¹³ *And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him.*

If you are a believer in Christ today, there is something about you that you may not know. You died in the year 33 A.D. In one sense, when Jesus died on the cross, in the mind and purpose of God, the old sinful nature of every believer was dying with Jesus. He was suffering for sins in our place, and therefore in one sense, we were regarded as being there too.

It's a strange irony. Our sinful nature made us dead to God. We were *dead in trespasses and sins*. We were outside of God's people – *uncircumcised in our flesh*. But that sinful nature had to be killed before we could live to God. So our deadness needed more death. It would be like if you had large growths on your fingers that deadened you to all feeling. Your fingers were dead to sensation. So you would have to kill those growths, cut them out, put them to death, so as to feel sensations in your fingertips again.

Our sin nature made us dead to feeling God. But when it is put to death, we can again know Him. Our old ways of living for self and pleasing self, had to face the wages of sin – which is death. But once Jesus said, *'It is finished'* – what did that mean regarding our sinful nature? It was done away with, disarmed. It was made as dead as the body of Jesus.

And what do you do with a dead body? You bury it.

So spiritually speaking, what did God do with your sins in 33 A.D?

According to **Romans 6:3-7** *Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?* ⁴ *Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.* ⁵ ¶ *For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of*

His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin.

Your sins are dead and buried, and in their place is Christ's life which was raised up. Do you know what else happened to you in 33 A.D? You were raised. You received life in the mind and purpose of God.

On the day when you placed your faith in Jesus Christ, God counted it to be true of you. What had happened then historically was made actual presently.

Verse 12 tells us this only happens *through faith in the working of God*. When you trusted in Christ, you died with Christ, were buried, and were raised again. You were *made alive together with Him*.

Baptism pictures this. A baptism service is actually a burial service. We use water to picture the ground, and we use it to picture Christ's cleansing blood. The person confesses Christ as their Lord and Saviour which means they have died with Him, have been buried with Him, and have been raised again with His life as their life.

How complete is your salvation, if your sins are buried, and if Jesus is your new life?

Now, allow me to take a little side path here for a few minutes. Many people believe that we are to baptise babies based upon these verses. They see that Paul connects baptism and circumcision. They then say, if baptism is the New Testament version of circumcision, and the Jews would circumcise their babies, we should baptise our babies.

Firstly, they are right for seeing the connection. Circumcision was the means of entering the Old Covenant, and baptism is the sign you have entered the New Covenant. But what such people fail to see is how different the covenants were.

Every Jew was circumcised. Circumcision was a way of showing they were under the Covenant of Moses. Circumcision was like adding your name to the contract. But what that covenant could not do was save anyone's soul. Many Jews were unbelievers. The Old Covenant told them how to live, how to worship; but it couldn't forgive their sins and reconcile them to God. Because the Old Covenant did not save anyone, it was perfectly acceptable to circumcise babies. You were just adding their name to the list of people under God's Law.

But the New Covenant is different. If you are in the New Covenant, you are saved. That's the meaning of the New Covenant – you are given a new heart, a new spirit within you. The old is stripped away, you are spiritually raised from the dead.

But because the New Covenant does save anyone who is in it, it is not acceptable to baptise babies. Everyone we baptise is claiming to have received a new heart, a new life, and is in personal, living relationship with God. We cannot baptise babies because the way you enter the New Covenant is by faith in Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Babies could be brought into the Old Covenant because that's all that was required; physical circumcision. Babies cannot be brought into the New Covenant because they are not old enough to exercise repentance and faith.

End of side-path. Our spiritual circumcision is a complete salvation because our sins are dead and buried and we have been raised up with Christ's life.

Here is the second way we know our salvation is complete:

II. He completely forgave all your sins (vs13-14)

I believe many people think that the cross is like a car-wash. They think that the day they were saved was like the day a car goes to the car-wash. The car-wash cleans your car of all the dirt it has built up till the day of the car wash. However, you then drive out of the car wash, and another car drives through a mud puddle, splashing your car, and you drive behind the exhaust of a truck belching thick, dirty smoke, and maybe it even starts to rain. Your car is not clean anymore. Some think that is what happens at salvation. You get washed of your guilt and sin on the day you trust Christ. But then you sin (which we do) and now you are dirty again. So some people even believe you must keep asking Jesus for your salvation again and again.

Salvation is not like a car wash. Here is where Scripture clarifies it for us. Look at the end of verse 13 “*having forgiven you all trespasses*”. How many of our sins did Jesus forgive us of? All! How many of **all** of your sins are still to be committed in the future?

Has Jesus forgiven you of them?

The next words give us a beautiful picture of what it means for Jesus to have forgiven us. It says “*having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross...*”

The words *handwriting of requirements* refers to something they did in ancient times. It was a hand-written certificate of debt, a bit like an IOU. If you owed someone money, you wrote out this certificate of debt. In the case of every human being, our IOU is very long. It consists of all the requirements of God's Law which we have broken, and what we owe God.

It is like a speeding fine. A speeding fine has your name on it, a smart picture of your car, and then states the law that you broke, for example in a 60 km/hour zone, you were traveling at 73 km/hour. You owe the city R200!

Our certificates of debt for our lives are massive. The list could look like this: Was supposed to honour parents; was supposed to tell the truth; was supposed to not commit adultery; was supposed to love his neighbor; was supposed to forgive others.

As the Bible says twice here – this was against us. It was not in our favour. What did Jesus do? It says – He wiped it out. That word is translated '*blot out*' in a few other Scriptures. It was used when the ancient people would take the papyri and blot out the ink on it. Likewise, the Greeks would take white plaster and white-out the tablet on which something was written. So what does Jesus do with our entire sin-debt? He wipes it out, completely.

How did He do that? On his own **cross**. He can erase our debt because He Himself paid it. You might remember Jesus' 'charge-sheet' was nailed to his cross - “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”. Jesus took our whole charge sheet and nailed it to His cross, taking the punishment, paying our fine. How much of it? He paid all of it.

But how many Christians live with the feeling that there is some sin they have committed in the past or present, for which God cannot and will not forgive them? How many live with guilt, gnawing at their being, while they try to run from themselves. Some try to forget by keeping themselves distracted in overwork, or in continual entertainment. Some try to make up for it with devotion – reading the Bible, prayer, service, church. Some try to make their sin seem less by repeating it, and trying to reset their conscience until it judges them to be innocent. When they do this, they are really saying, Christ has not forgiven me of all my sins. But if salvation is complete, then forgiveness is total.

But there is a third way He completed our salvation.

III. He completely triumphed over your accusers. (v15)

Martin Luther had a terrible dream once. He dreamt that Satan came to him with scrolls on which were written, in Luther's own handwriting, a record of his own life. And Satan would ask, "Is that true, did you write that?" And Luther would have to admit it was. Scroll after scroll was produced by Satan, as Luther sobbed in misery. But, as Satan was about to depart, Luther realised something and said, "It's true, all of it. But write across it all, 'The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son cleanses us from all sin'".

When our own consciences are not accusing us, it comes from another source – Satan and his forces.

Our truest enemies are those who wish us to sin and be condemned by God. Satan and his fallen angels seek to destroy humans through sin. Their victory would have been assured, if Christ had not risen from the dead. But when He did that, he stripped Satan and his forces of their victory, and last great weapon – death.

But when he rose, and 40 days later, ascended, He passed through the air – the prince of the power of the air's domain, and so made a public example of His defeated foes. His ascension was like a victory parade, openly humiliating the principalities and the powers which had warred against God. It was a public triumph.

What that means is this – when Satan comes to accuse the believer, He does not have anything to stand on. The charge sheet has been dismissed. Jesus has paid our penalty. And He has publicly shown that He has won, so Satan cannot pretend that result is in doubt.

Jesus has completely triumphed over your accuser. But your accuser does not so easily give up his cause.

If you were caught speeding, and the fine was R500. The fine is paid for you by a kind person you know. As far as the city is concerned, you are no longer in debt to them. But let's say someone dressed like a Metro Cop came to you and said – 'You are a reckless and negligent driver. You had better pay me R500.' I suppose you could pay them if you wanted to, but it would be foolish, because your fine is paid. You will feel regret that you had ever committed the offence, but you don't need to pay anything more.

Satan comes to the Christian and demands you act as if you were condemned by God and separated from Him. He cannot make God condemn you, but he can seek to make you feel as if you are condemned by God. He can seek to make you think you are.

And if you want to, you can give Satan the condemning guilt he seeks, and avoid God, and hide in the garden like Adam, and make yourself fig leaves. Or you can say – 'My penalty has been paid by Jesus Christ. I regret those sins very much, but I am not under condemnation, so I will not think or act like I am.'

So look at this spiritual circumcision – Jesus Completely buried your sins and gave you His life; Jesus has forgiven all of your sins; and Jesus has triumphed over your accusers. Does that sound like a complete salvation? Does that sound like you need to add anything to it?

That is why Paul writes the next sentence: *So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, ¹⁷ which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.*

If Jesus has done such a complete work, do not let others judge you to be unsaved or unspiritual in regards to such things as food diets and days.

The Jewish legalists focused on diets and days; avoiding the unclean foods, eating only the clean foods. There are people today who tell you that as well. No red meat on Fridays; only fish during Lent. In fact, Roman Catholics believe that if you eat meat on Friday during Lent – it is a mortal sin, that is, it cuts off our relationship with God. Some people tell Jewish believers in Jesus that they should fast during Yom Kippur. Some will prescribe to you how much and how long you should fast. Ellen G White said: ‘Vegetables, fruits, and grains should compose our diet. Not an ounce of flesh meat should enter our stomachs. The eating of flesh is unnatural. We are to return to God's original purpose in the creation of man.’

Certain people insist upon Christian Jews eating only kosher foods. And yet all of the groups I have just mentioned believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. They will claim that Jesus paid it all.

Paul says – these things were a shadow, but the body is Christ. Just like your shadow is just an outline of you, so the various food laws just pointed to the shape of Christ. But now that He has come, there is no need to go back to the shadow. God had to teach Peter this with his vision of the animals on the sheet - “*Rise, Peter, kill and eat.*”

If Jesus has completed your salvation, why do you need to partake of and avoid certain foods to be saved?

Paul lists three kinds of days – the feasts, the new moons and the Sabbaths. The feasts were the feast days like Purim, Passover, Yom Kippur, Sukkot. The new moons were the signalling of the start of the month, a day observed by Jews with the blowing of the trumpet. The Sabbaths were the weekly Sabbaths and other holy days set apart. Again, we have people today telling us to observe, and not to observe certain days. Let me quote directly from Ellen G. White :

The sign, or seal, of God is revealed in the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, the Lord's memorial of creation. . . . **The mark of the beast is the opposite of this--the observance of the first day of the week."**

Some people tell us that Sunday is a pagan day and we should be keeping Sabbath. Aside from these, we are told we must keep Jewish feasts. Others tell us we are antichrists if we observe Christmas, or Good Friday or Easter. The Bible says – *days are just a shadow, the body is Christ.*

Now, if you want to observe a certain diet for health reasons, that's fine. If you want to fast before the Lord, that's fine. If you choose to use the feasts to remember Christ – fine. If you choose to observe, or not to observe, certain holidays, according to Romans 14, as long as you do it before the Lord – that's fine.

But beware the ones who tell you that you need such things to be saved. And beware of the ones who tell you that you need it to be a complete Christian. They may not come out and say you aren't saved, but they imply you are very deficient if you don't include their practice.

If it is not food and drink, it is rituals like baptism, or confirmation, or penance, or last unction, or speaking in tongues, or taking communion, or acts of service, or tithing, or keeping the Law or doing various things or not doing various things.

And some of those things are necessary results of being a Christian. Some of them are not.

It really comes down to two questions:

- 1) What does Jesus do when He saves you?
- 2) At what point are you saved?

To the first question, a lot of legalists would say, 'He paid for our sins.

To the second, they would say – 'When you do this and this and that and that.' But the Bible says – you are saved when Jesus saves you, by simple believing trust in His work on the cross. Anything more would take away from Jesus, and give us credit.

That is why Paul said to the Galatians:

Galatians 2:21 *"I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."*