

July 6, 2008

## Colossians 2:11-12

Alright good morning! I'm so glad you are able to be here on this holiday weekend. Grab your Bibles and let's dive into the Word of God together. We are in our study of Colossians. We've made it to chapter 2 and today we'll look at the next 2 verses – verses 11&12.

Remember the context we've seen through chapter 2. Paul is writing the Colossian believers at this point in the letter to really address the false teaching that is causing problems for the church. We saw two weeks ago that this boils down to the cosmic battle between truth and lies – between the truth claims of God and the truth claims of Satan. And again what Paul is doing here is not dissecting the lies of this false teaching; instead he is presenting the truth bluntly and clearly. The reason we saw last time is that when you know the truth, every system of error crumbles in the face of the truth.

But we also acknowledged that Colossians has been the most difficult book we've studied so far. And that reality continues today. These 2 verses are difficult to get a grasp on first of all because there is a lot of debate on what they mean but also because Paul uses two metaphors that we aren't used to. But I don't want you to let that make you turn off your brain & heart today. Because once again, if we miss the seriousness of what Paul says here today, not only do we miss out on some wonderful truth for our hearts, but we literally place our lives in peril. Not to be overly dramatic – but you'll see what I mean by the time we get done. So let's get started. We'll go back and pick up verses 9 and 10 for the context of verses 11 and 12.

9 *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,*  
10 *and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.*  
11 *In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ,*  
12 *having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.*

Ok – after this amazing statement about the goodness – the deity of Jesus Christ in verse 9 – we saw last time in verse 10 that we are given fullness in this Jesus – which means that we are made complete. Well what does that mean? In the next 6 verses Paul gives us 3 aspects of that completion in Christ and today we'll just look at the first one together. He says again in verse 11: “In Him you were also circumcised in the putting off of your sinful nature...”

Now we know that this heresy the Colossians are battling is centered around displacing Jesus as the only source of salvation. And a part of their attack was teaching these mostly Gentile Colossians that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Every Jewish boy was circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day – it was the sign that he belonged to the covenant nation – the people of God. But throughout Israel's history **two schools of thought** developed on this practice.

**The first one was that circumcision was enough to SAVE you.** This was the surgical salvation view. Basically, if you were circumcised, you were saved – you were in the covenant relationship with God. The physical act was all that was needed. The Jew that believed that would argue that it didn't matter if a Jew was good or bad – just that he was circumcised. That was the typical view of the Jews in Jesus' day. It was also a typical view in Paul's day. **But it was WRONG.** Listen to what Paul says in Romans 2. You can turn there if you like – **Romans 2:25-29.**

*“Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised.”* ---in other words it's fine if you keep the law – but as soon as you break the law, it doesn't matter anymore.

Verse 26 *“If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?”* ---In other words people who haven't had the operation

but do keep all the laws are brought into the covenant blessing (though of course keeping all the laws is impossible for anyone but Christ).

Then verse 28 *“A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart,…”*

**The other view was that circumcision was only an OUTWARD sign.** There were those true spiritual Jews who understood that this procedure was an outward demonstration that we are born sinful & need cleansing. The cutting away of the male foreskin was a graphic way to demonstrate that man needs cleansing at the deepest level of our being. That's **the BIBLICAL view**. That **it is an illustration that man is in desperate need of a cleansing of the HEART.**

In **Deuteronomy 10:16**, Moses told the people to *“circumcise your hearts and stiffen your neck no more.”* Then in **chapter 30** verse 6 he adds *“The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.”* God was always concerned with the heart, not the physical ritual.

**For Christians then, what Paul is saying here is that outward circumcision is UNNECESSARY because – as verse 11 says – we have a circumcision done not by the hands of men but by Christ.** And the focus or object of what Christ does in us the NIV calls “the putting off of the sinful nature.”

The Greek there is literally the “body of flesh” – it refers here to the sinful, fallen human nature that totally dominates each of us before salvation. **Christians have been cleansed of DOMINANCE of sin and been given a new nature created in righteousness.**

That's what **Romans 6:6** says *“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”* And as a result, Paul says in **2 Corinthians 5:17** *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”*

Now you might say, “Brett, if we have had our sinful nature put away, and if we have been given a new nature, then why do I still sin?!” Fair question. The answer is **Christians have been freed from sin's dominance and judgment, though not yet from its PRESENCE.** For lack of a better metaphor, we've been given a new heart in an old body – a new inside in an old outside.

Paul talks about this in **Romans 7**. You can turn there if you want. Romans 7 beginning in verse 15:

*“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.”*

---Paul says, it's not my new nature doing this; it is the old flesh that is still in me. Then verse 18 goes on:

*“I know that nothing good lives in me, (verse 20)*

*Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law;”*

---He says my new nature loves God. My new nature wants to do good things – wants to obey God – wants to respond to God. And then in verse 23:

*“but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.”*

---If I could just remove my good inside from this bad outside, then that'd be perfect. So in verse 24 Paul says:

*“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”*

---So I have this new nature given to me solely by Christ which means the end of the old nature positionally – **We are no longer under the control of sin, but I must battle the INFLUENCE of sin with our new nature. That’s what SANCTIFICATION** is all about: becoming horizontally in life here what we are vertically in relationship with God spiritually.

Ok? But listen – I wanted to address that question but understand that **in Colossians 2, Paul is not dealing with the fact that we still sin, he is saying our salvation is COMPLETE.** – he is saying you don’t need anybody to get you more saved. You hear people say I got saved as a kid but later on I got re-saved or saved again or more saved. No – you can’t get more saved. Either you are or you aren’t. You don’t need anything added to the new nature that is in us by the circumcision done by Christ – you just need to bring your behavior into harmony with that new nature. That’s what Paul is talking about in Romans 7 & 8. In 7 he talks about the battle. In 8 he talks about the solution. Turn to **Rom 8:10-14**

*“But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation-- but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”*

Ok – got that? Now Paul goes on in **verse 12** in Colossians 2. He says *“having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead.”*

Now **Paul is not talking about WATER baptism here.** I mean he just got through explaining how one outward ceremony was not needed for salvation, why would he now say that this other one is? So what is he talking about? Stick with me here – **he is talking about the inward reality that water baptism is an outward picture of. It is a picture of the UNION of a believer with Christ.**

The word “baptism” simply means to “dip under or place into.” You were placed into Christ in salvation and water baptism is a beautiful picture of that. John MacArthur explains that “when you put your faith in Christ, you are buried with Christ. It’s as if you go right to the cross. God, in His timeless mind, propels you back in history 2000 years, hangs you on that cross, and you die there and are buried. And on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, you come out of the grave with Christ’s new life. **We are so identified with Jesus by FAITH that we are in His death, his burial, and His resurrection.** What an amazing truth!”

And **all that is accomplished not by our outward acts but by God’s POWER in response to our faith in His power.** **Romans 10:9-10** says *“That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”* That is a miracle. We experience the same power with which God raised Jesus from the dead.

Now what do we need to get from this today? **Three things** that build on each other this morning – and please don’t miss these today.

**Number 1 – Salvation is complete in CHRIST.** Our redemption, our eternal destiny, our purpose, our being given life, and we’ll see next week – our forgiveness and our victory over the enemy – all of that is complete in salvation in Christ alone. We’ve already said that no one gets more or resaved. **Christ makes us positionally right with God but we must continue in partnership with His Spirit in us to become horizontally in LIFE who we are positionally in Christ. That’s that SANCTIFICATION.** **Philippians 2:12-13** says *“continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”*

That's what we saw again where our belief determines our behavior. That's what Paul was again saying in verse 2-7 of Colossians 2. But listen,...

**Number 2 is that we have to be on guard against mistaking parts of the evidence of sanctification as the MEANS to salvation.** What I mean is falling into the belief that:

- Because I know about Jesus and go to church on Sunday morning, I am a Christian.
- Because I know about Jesus and give money to the church, I am a Christian.
- Because I know about Jesus and don't drink or smoke or cuss or sleep around, I am a Christian.
- Or even leave off that first part – that just because I am a good person relative to the rest of the world or in comparison to what I could be, that means I am a Christian.

That's exactly what Paul is battling here: the lie that just because you are circumcised means you are in the people or family of God. No. **The outward only has value when it matches and reveals the INWARD reality.** When the belief that produces your behavior is not – and I need you to hear me here – your belief is not that “if I do these things I am a Christian,” but that “because I am a Christian, I do these things to bring me closer to God and in obedience to my Lord.” See the difference? It is crucial and it is commonly the problem with people in churches today. That is why there are people in churches all over this city today who think they are Christians when they are not. They've confused the evidence of sanctification with the means of salvation.

Now having said that, I want to point out one more application. Verse 12 says we are saved by faith – the means of salvation is faith – Paul says that we are circumcised by Christ, buried with Him in baptism, and raised with through your faith in the power of God.

Now listen –. **Faith or Belief ENABLES this spiritual reality – our being circumcised by Christ as well as being buried and raised with Him.**

But we can't see this spiritual reality can we? We can't see the truth of salvation in a person's heart. You can't see that new nature. You can't see that new spiritual heart. You can't see the Holy Spirit of God inside a person. All of that is the result of our faith in God's power to make it happen – faith & belief in the God who brought Jesus back from the dead.

But – **that same faith, that same belief is what causes a true Christian to CONTINUE in sanctification throughout life.** It is what causes – what determines the outward behavior of a child of God to be more and more conforming to God's Word and God's will and the character of Jesus. And that we can see.

That is why all of this is so important. That's why understanding our vision as a church – that life in Christ is a life surrendered by faith to truth and a life changed by belief into obedience is so crucial.

Listen – **if the outward evidence isn't there, then there is no logical reason to believe that the INWARD reality is there either.**

What does that mean today? It means:

- If we can continue in a sin on & on without remorse – without fear – without sorrow and repentance...
- If we can go to a church service regularly and yet have no desire to go any further, no desire to get any more involved, no desire to do anything for the Kingdom...
- If we can hear the Word spoken once a week with no longing to know more, no desire to memorize it and hide it in our hearts...
- If we can claim to know this Jesus who literally died for our sins to give us life in Him and to secure an eternity for us that isn't in Hell and yet we can go through life year after year with no real desire or effort to tell anyone else about this Jesus...

Folks you can pick your “if statement” here. **If there is not continuing evidence not of a specific habitual Christian act but of the expanding transformation of our lives, then we have reason to doubt the inner reality of our SALVATION.**

I’m not talking about going to church or giving money or being a generally good person or whatever it is you decide a Christian is supposed to do. I’m talking about the transformation of your life where you are more and more like Jesus in every thing – where there is no “that’s just the way I am” excuse – no – you are more like Jesus today than you were last year – 6 months ago – last week.

Because if there is no continuing evidence of the transformation of our lives to be like Jesus then we have reason to doubt the inner reality of our salvation.

I know that may be offensive. I know it is scary, it is uncomfortable, it is convicting – but it is the truth. And like we saw two weeks ago, that’s what Jesus says will set us free.

Folks, what Paul is saying here is that our being given fullness in Christ in verse 10 means the life and death of Jesus Christ is the only thing that offers us salvation – and it is a complete salvation in Him – and it needs nothing added to it – but it is and will be a transforming salvation in Him because we are no longer under the control of sin but have been given a new nature by Christ.

**Praise God for the truth that can transform our lives! The question we have to deal with is “Is it TRANSFORMING mine?”**

Am I doing some Christian acts or is my life being transformed by His life in my new nature? Let’s pray.