

Colossians 2:8-12
Jesus: Our Baptism

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Col. 2:8-12, ESV)

Introduction:

If you've ever had to install a new operating system on a computer, you've probably experienced two emotions: excitement and frustration. On one hand, there is excitement because of all the things that the new operating system promises. On the other hand, there is frustration because, usually, the new OS not only fails to meet expectations, but also introduces new bugs and problems that you didn't have before. At this point, you end up until all hours, online (if you can connect) trying to find fixes and patches.

The Bible teaches that our heart's operating system—every aspect of our being—is flawed and buggy because of a virus called sin. What do most of us do? We cruise through life looking for fixes and patches.

What Paul has been telling the Colossians (and us) is that, because of Jesus, we don't need to do that anymore. You see, Jesus came and, at the cross, took on our virus—sin and, in turn, those who put their faith in him are given a completely new operating system. In fact, this new OS, not only functions better but it seeks out any bugs or vestiges of your old life and, in a sense, uninstalls them.

Since this is the case—you don't need anything else. If anyone comes along and tells you that you need their patches or fixes you should tell them, "In Christ, I've got everything I need."

In last week's text, we look at a **positive** command given to the Colossians: *Just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.* We receive him according to apostolic teaching (the Bible) and by faith alone. So we walk by faith, according to God's Word.

In this week's text, 2:8-12, Paul builds upon the previous verses, now, by giving a **negative** command: *See to it that no one takes you captive...*

Today we'll look at two points:

- I. *What We Shouldn't Do* (v. 8)
- II. *Why We Don't Need to Do It—A* (vv. 9-10)
- III. *Why We Don't Need to Do It—B* (vv. 11-12)

I. *What We Shouldn't Do* (v. 8)

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

The force of this negative command is actually stronger than is communicated by this translation. The word, translated here as "captive," has to do with the idea of a slave-trader who might raid a town or a village capture unwitting victims. In other words, it's deadly serious.

Interestingly enough, Paul seems to be making another preemptive strike here against those who might try to capture them and how they might attempt it. On one hand, he seems to implicate

Jewish teachers who might come along teaching that Jesus is good, but Jesus plus following certain laws or traditions is better. Or those who might say, “You’re pleasing to God because of Christ’s work—as long as you do things the way they’ve always been done.”

On the other hand, when he mentions “elemental spirits,” he’s probably referring to the Gentile world-view of the day that either worshiped other gods or, at very least, were very superstitious.

Both of these world-views, at some level are an attempt to cover ones bases. In other words, even if they give some assent to the gospel, they add something to it. Paul says neither of these is according to Christ.

Paul then tells the Colossians (and us), why we don’t need to consider anything but Jesus and the source, not only of our salvation, but the source of our sanctification as well.

II. *Why We Don’t Need Do It—A (vv. 9-10)*

⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

In verse 8, Paul warned not to be taken captive by “human tradition” or “the elemental spirits of the world.” After saying this he confronts each one of them, starting in reverse order, with the spirits.

I’ve told you before that I have trouble sleeping every now and then and when that happens, I often find myself, late at night, watching TV, flipping channels between the *Discovery Channel* or *Animal Planet*. They’ve got all the cool shows. *Discovery’s* got shows like *Dirty Jobs* and *The Verminators*.¹ *Animal Planet* has shows like *Meerkat Manor* and, my favorite on that channel, *The Dog Whisperer*.

The Dog Whisperer follows Cesar Millan, a dog-trainer, as he visits the homes of people with “problem pooches.” What’s interesting, and relevant to our discussion, is his philosophy of dog-training. It’s just this: the dog is almost never the problem. It’s a dog! The problem, almost always is the owner. You see, dogs are pack animals and what they respect and obey is the *Alpha* dog. In almost every episode he spends very little time training the dog and lots of time training the owner to live out his/her rightful place in the home—*Alpha*.

As I studied this week, and mulled over verses 9-10, at some level, Paul is doing for us, here, what Cesar does for struggling dog-owners. In a sense, you could call him the Saint-Whisperer! What do I mean by this? Look at the text again.

Here, Paul reminds us of the reason we shouldn’t be taken captive to human traditions or superstitions or fear of evil beings is because, in Christ, we are the alpha-dogs. Consider Paul’s logic. Here is why you don’t need to look any further than Jesus for fullness and life.

1. In Christ all the fullness of the deity dwells;
2. You have been filled, in him;
3. He’s the head of all rule and authority

The bottom-line: You need not fear or look to other things demons, angels, or even the Law for your hope and security because the one who created them dwells in you. Remember 1 John 4:4, “Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.” That’s not the only reason.

III. *Why We Don’t Need Do It—B (vv. 11-12)*

¹ This is a reality show that follows a team of exterminators into situations that are too disgusting or dangerous for the average “bug-man.”

After, explaining why they need to be taken captive or attracted to the elemental spirits of the world, Paul takes on “human tradition.”

If Paul is, in fact, warning them about potential problems that might surface, he might have had the Galatian problem in mind here. Remember that there were Jewish teachers who had come among them telling them that if they wanted to be “good” or “truly obedient” Christians, they would get circumcised. Another way to put it is to say that “Jesus is good, but Jesus + circumcision is better.”

If and when these bogus teachers make it to Colossae and say, “You need to be circumcised.” You can say, “I have been...I was circumcised, spiritually, at my baptism.”

What Paul does is derive his understanding of baptism from his understanding of circumcision. In order to understand the purpose, significance, and objects of baptism, you’ve got to go back and consider the purpose, significance, and object of circumcision.

We see this in the life of Abraham (Gen. 12,15, 17).

In **Genesis 12**, God initiates a relationship with Abraham—he tells him to pick up all his belongings and move from the land of the Chaldees to Canaan. He does this.

In **Genesis 15**, God comes to Abraham and reiterates his promise to give him the land of Canaan and to bless him. And Abraham says, how can I be sure?

God makes a covenant with Abraham.

He tells Abraham to take animals and cut them in two pieces and lay them out on the ground.

Abraham does this but he becomes very afraid. Why? Because in the ANE they would often cut covenants this way and lesser party would walk through the animals—in doing so they were both saying if I don’t keep covenant, may what happened to these animals, happen to me.

Covenants always included blessings and cursings [if you disobeyed].

That night he had a vision—he saw a vision of a smoking oven and a blazing torch pass through the pieces

Imagine his relief—God, the greater party passed through the pieces and said, Abraham if I don’t give you everything I promised, may it be to me as it is with these animals.

Abraham had a choice. He could either believe that God did all the work or he could try to do it himself.

The bible says that he believed that God could do what he promised and it was credited to him as righteousness.

In **Genesis 17**, God takes things one step further—*circumcision*. Read 17:9-11.

Although God did all the work, Abraham still had to be obedient and give himself, his male children, and males² in his household the mark of the covenant *circumcision*.³

² Females weren’t circumcised because in a patriarchal society, a woman would’ve been considered to be included in the covenant either by virtue of membership in her father’s household or a husband’s.

^{3 9} And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰ This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. (Gen. 17:9-11, ESV)

The mark represented three things:

1. the cutting away of sin;
2. a change of heart;
3. inclusion in the household of faith

Understanding these things helps us to understand what Paul means when he tells us, “In him also were you circumcised...having been baptized.” The implication is that under the new covenant, or more precisely, the new administration of the old covenant, baptism has superseded, or taken the place of circumcision, just as the Lord’s Supper has taken the place, in the church, of the Passover feast. In other words, in and because of the work of Christ, baptism is now the mark of the covenant. And, being the mark of the covenant, like circumcision, it represents three things:

1. the washing away of sin;
2. the renewal of the heart by the Spirit of God;
3. inclusion in the household of faith, the body of Christ

I want to focus on this last point, because it is the only one we can “see.” Notice where Paul says, “putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of [effected by] Christ” (v. 11). We see that in circumcision, as an adult, it marked the leaving of one life and community and the entrance into another. For children it marked inclusion into the community of faith which, one day, they would have to make a decision as to whether they would stay in that community.

The same is true for us. When we baptize someone who has trusted Jesus for the first time as an adult, we are recognizing their inclusion into the body of Christ. When we baptize an infant, we are also recognizing their inclusion into the body of Christ. With the knowledge that, although they have been included in God’s covenant, they are ultimately responsible to be obedient to it, by putting their faith in Jesus.

The bottom-line, regardless of one’s position on “infant baptism,” is this: in our baptism, we are identified with Jesus and all of his work on our behalf. In fact, we are so identified with them that Paul speaks of death and resurrection (ours) having already happened. In other words, there is nothing—no amount of obedience, law-keeping, or human tradition—that can add to the work of Jesus. In him, God is pleased with you.