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Colossians 2:8-15 – **Complete in Christ**

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See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

⁹For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

¹³When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Who here shops at Costco?

On a cold winter day have you ever just gone there to get out of the house?

You have no intention of buying anything...

But a couple hundred dollars later you now have 2-5' long ice scrapers, an inflatable raft that can hold your whole extended family, and, of course, a new detachable shower head.

When we stepped through those doors, we didn't know that something was missing from our lives...

But Costco has that uncanny ability to help us realize all those things we didn't know we were missing.

This is what we'll be talking about today—

Not consumerism—

But a spiritual lack—

That feeling that something's missing inside of us...

That there's something wrong in life or that we're incomplete.

This is where the people of Colossae are at...

Something is missing...

Something is lacking...

Or at least that's what the people and culture around them are saying.

These are Christians who have received the gospel message of Christ's death and resurrection—

The message that proclaims forgiveness of sins in Christ...

And a restored relationship with the God of all creation because of the person and work of Christ—

They are now being told that something's still missing.

There was a teaching going around at the time that was pretty complex...

But for our sake, we can say that it had to do with seeing a big gap between the spiritual world and the material world...

Spirit = Good

Material = Bad

God/Divine Powers = Good

Humans and Creation = Bad

The gulf between God and creation was so big—

God was so good and creation was so bad—

That God could have nothing to do with humans, earth, or anything material.

Do you see a problem here?

What would it mean if God could not come into direct relation with this world?

It means that God could not directly create the world;

It means that God could not have become flesh in Jesus Christ;

And it means that we could not communicate directly with God...

We could not be in a relationship with God without something else between us.

This teaching was saying, “You need something to reach God.”

“You need more than what you’re being told by the Christian message...”

“Because God is unattainable...”

“And you need to go through intermediaries.”

“If you want your sins forgiven you need to do certain things:”

“You need to worship in certain ways and have visions, and appease the powers that go between us and God.”

This teaching was running in direct opposition to the gospel message...

The message that said that Christ was all that was needed.

What they were hearing was a lie.

This teaching created a need that Christians didn’t actually have.

It took them away from the true message found only in Jesus Christ.

For many of us this is common...

We feel like there’s something missing in life...that something just isn’t right...

That we’re incomplete...

We’re told that we need more in order to be full.

Let’s take a trip to Costco:

Let’s pretend that we somehow managed to find a parking spot...

And we just stepped through the doors...

We showed our credentials that get us into the store...

And now we lay our eyes on those things we didn’t know we needed.

What’s on the shelf for you (the shelf of your spiritual life)?

What’s this world telling you that you need...

That you cannot find in Christ?

Is it a monster pack of Self-Abasement/Self-Punishment?

You daily struggle with a sense of guilt and shame over the things you’ve done in the past...

Maybe you’ve committed sexual sins...

Living a double life...lying to the ones that are closest to you.

Or maybe it was something hurtful you said or something malicious you did...

And you think, "Surely this can't be forgiven!"

"I need to suffer more—pay more for my sins."

You don't let yourself off the hook.

So you pick up this pack of Self-Abasement/Self-Punishment...

You don't deserve good things so you belittle yourself...

You think that all you deserve is pain and humiliation for your sins...

You pick up this pack trying to make up for your sins...

Not convinced that Christ is enough.

You stroll on and find a bulk pack of Achievements...

Because if you were honest, you don't feel good about yourself...

You feel inferior to everyone around you...

You've always been trying to earn the love and approval of friends and family.

Maybe people would love you if you had better things to post on Facebook...

More exotic trips, job promotions, creative things you around the house.

Or maybe you've found that one thing you're really good at...

And you cling onto it as your lifeline...

Because it gives you meaning and recognition.

It's hard for you to believe that God can love you just as you are...

You're not convinced that Christ's work is enough for *you*...

So you throw the bulk pack of Achievements in your cart.

Finally, you see a mega pack of Spiritual Experiences.

You've always doubted God's presence among you;

You've questioned if he's really been there;

And you've never had a dramatic "coming to Jesus" moment where you knew that the Spirit was there.

With this mega pack of Spiritual Experiences you'll know for sure that you're not alone...

That you in fact are joined together with God...

You won't have to trust in words alone...

You'll have the experience to back it up.

Just as it was in Colossae, this world is trying to sell us these things we don't really need...

We don't need them, because we're not really missing anything...

Paul says, "For in Christ, we have been made complete." (2:10)

"In Christ, we have been brought to fullness."

Let that sink in for a second:

When it comes to our relationship with God—

The one who gives our lives all meaning and purpose...

And the one who gives us our identity—

We lack nothing!

We are complete.

Paul gets this point across in a unique way...

He compares circumcision and baptism...

Saying that baptism is the new circumcision.

In the Old Testament circumcision was used as a sign of the covenant between God and God's people.

It confirmed their relationship.

Every male eight days old born into the community—

Or those males coming in from the outside—

They were required to have the foreskin of their penis cut off.

This was a symbolic mark of God's relationship of grace with his people.

They underwent a partial "cutting off" that kept them from being completely cut off from God's people. (Michael Horton)

In a sense, the knife of judgement "passed over" the person by only cutting off a piece of flesh...

Instead of taking their lives.

It symbolized the cutting away of sin rather than the cutting off of the sinner. (Michael Horton)

But circumcision was never meant to be only an outward sign...

It was meant to represent what happened with the heart.

The Lord wanted his people to follow him...

To listen to and obey his commands.

He wanted their *hearts* circumcised (Deut 10:16)...

To be purified and free of sin.

We know that this wasn't the case though...

The people sinned against God and against each other time and time again.

So God, in the person of Jesus Christ, went through the ultimate circumcision...

The ultimate removal of sin.

We're not talking about a partial cutting away of Christ's flesh...

We're talking about his body being nailed to a cross.

Jesus Christ took all of the sins of the world and had them laid on his body...

His circumcision was one of death...

Having his whole body of flesh cut off. (Andrew Lincoln)

In his circumcision—death on the cross—he *completed* the meaning of circumcision in the old covenant...

The "stripping away of sinful flesh." (Leonard Vander Zee)

The sin that acted as a barrier between God and his people—

The sin that prevented them from being in a relationship—

Was destroyed by Christ.

God's people were now made complete in Christ.

Thanks be to God circumcision has been replaced by baptism.

There is no more shedding of blood because of what Christ has done...

Being immersed in or sprinkled with water is now the mark of God's people.

In baptism we are joined to the work of Christ...

His death and resurrection.

When we descend into the waters of baptism we die to our old life.

Our old life is cut away...we are spiritually circumcised. (Geerhardus Vos)

The sins that kept us from relationship with God...

Are cut away from us by the work of Christ.

And when we come up out of the water, we join Christ in his resurrection.

We are inheritors of a new life found in Christ...

Baptism points to the inner reality that we are united with God the Son.

We are made complete...we are made full.

It's not the water itself that does it though—

And it's not the ritual—

Rather it's the Spirit of God that *has* worked this, and *is* working this in God's people—

Infants, children and adults.

In baptism we see a tangible witness to the promise that God works in us...

We are joined to the person and work of Christ...

We are brought to fullness!

We are complete in Christ.

If we are complete, then nothing else is needed.

We can stroll through our spiritual Costco and leave with an empty cart because we are already full.

We can put that mega pack of Self-Punishment back on the shelf.

Those sins we think we need to pay for with our own guilt or humiliation...

Have been destroyed by the work of Christ.

They have been nailed to cross and no longer belong to us.

We can put the bulk size box of Achievement back on the shelf too.

Many of us do struggle with feelings of not being good enough;

Not being lovable;

And just feeling inferior and inadequate in life.

We might feel this way, but this is no longer our reality.

We don't need other things to affirm us because we now belong to Christ.

He gives us our identity.

He tells us, "You are lovely."

"I created you so beautifully."

"I love you so much that I gave up my life for you."

You can stop trying to do things to make people love you—

You can start living this new life—

Because you are already complete.

And we can put back the mega pack of Spiritual Experiences.

"Look at the waters of baptism..."

"Let this assure you and remind you that you are mine."

"You belong to me...my name is written on your heart..."

"You are engraved on the palm of my hand..."

"You don't need out-of-body spiritual experiences..."

"Take me at my word that I will never leave you or turn away from you."

In Christ nothing else is needed.

We've been made whole...we've been made complete.

This week, I challenge you to say this prayer every day:

Lord, remind me that I am complete in you.