

Spiritual Maturity: A Heart that Has Been Raised with Christ Colossians 2:9-12

Intro:

- In **Colossians 2:9-12** we bring to a close our little mini-series on spiritual maturity. We have been following the line of thought in the text that began in **Colossians 1:24-28**.

Paul said his purpose in ministry was to present everyone mature in Christ. He had in view standing at the judgment seat of Christ but the implications of this mean progress in spiritual growth along the way. For most of us that spiritual growth is slow. It is certainly a process that lasts a lifetime. Yet there are times when we have spiritual growth spurts and we make great strides in our walk with God. The point is that we continue that process until we stand before our Savior.

- **I want you to notice what Paul said in v. 27: warning everyone & teaching everyone.** This was what we covered in the last two sermons in **vv. 4 & 8**. Part of their growth in spiritual maturity was to recognize that believers have an enemy and to grow spiritually meant to not be deceived by their false teaching.

The enemy of the believers preached a very similar message that said *"to grow spiritually we must defeat our fleshly nature and the way to do it is with our latest spiritual strategies and techniques"*.

Paul said the homegrown traditions of the false teachers would not work. The person and work of Christ is the only way to stop the indulgences of our flesh.

- **Main point:** Being filled with Christ and raised with Christ provides all the spiritual power we need to conquer sin in our lives.

I. To be in Christ is to be filled with presence of Christ (vv. 9-10)

- *"For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,"²⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority."*
- There is a parallel between **Colossians 2:9** and **Colossians 1:19**. Look back at **Colossians 1:19** . . .
- **Paul circles back to the theme in order to drive the point home that Jesus Christ is God.** Part of the Apostle Paul's point here is that the incarnation, God taking bodily form in Christ, was and is the *"solid reality"* that was foreshadowed in the Old Testament with all the ancient promises of how God would dwell with his people. Isaiah's prophecy was the His name would be called Emmanuel—God with us.
- **One of those fulfillments of Old Testament shadows is found in the significance of the Greek word for "dwells" in v. 9.** This is the same Old Testament word for God's *dwelling* in the Temple in Jerusalem.

The word dwell is loaded with covenant meaning. We find in this word the covenant idea that God's dwelling is NOW found in Christ. The physical body of Jesus was/is the sole Temple of the fullness of divine glories of God are found.

- *Here is what is so utterly stunning and breathtaking about this—Jesus who is the fullness of deity now dwells in us.* This is what **v. 10** is talking about. Listen to **v. 10** again . . .

- The **"in him"** phrase means—we are united with Christ. So by our union with him we participate in His life! By our union with Him is how we have the fullness of His life. This is important because the false teachers in that day were calling people to be filled with the *"spirit"* but it was not the *"Spirit of Christ."*
- Here is the line of logic in these verses: *Christ holds all the fullness of the Deity of God. We cannot experience the fullness of the deity of God except in Christ. As a Christian you are filled with the Spirit of Christ, which mean you are filled with the fullness of the Holy Spirit.*

Application:

1. **Verse 9 is the definition of the incarnation of Christ and it is a distinctively Christian doctrine that must be believed.**
 - a. There certainly are very practical implications for the incarnation and these will certainly be addressed later in the letter but for now Paul's point is that we believe in Christ the fullness of God dwells.
 - b. The incarnation, God becoming or taking on flesh in order to redeem sinful humanity is not an optional doctrine. To reject the incarnation of God in Christ is to reject Christianity. So we must believe that Jesus is the essence of God, undivided and in its whole fullness. In Christ that fullness dwells in God's exalted state, so that He is the essential and adequate image of God. The fact that Jesus is God, blasts the idea of the false teachers that the fullness of the divine is found among the hierarchy of spiritual powers. The fullness of deity is found in Jesus in whom the fullness of God dwells bodily. The question is—do you really believe it? To be a Christian you must.
 2. **Verse 10 states to believers, *"and you have been filled with him."***
 - a. **Let me ask you a question, have you ever heard someone talk about the *"wonderful spirit-filled life"*?** The *spirit-filled life* is not some special state a Christian attains by working his way up the spiritual maturity ladder. It is given when he is born-again. He is filled with the fullness of the Spirit of Christ.

I think we often base our experience of being "Sprit-filled" believers on how we feel. If you are stressed or sick or hurting or tired you don't feel *spirit-filled*. Here is the truth for us—to be filled with the Holy Spirit is not based on how you feel it is based on faith in Christ. The question is are you believing in, trusting in and resting in Christ in your stressed, anxious, hopeless, helpless, tired state? If you are then you are *spirit-filled*.
- #### II. To be in Christ is to be raised from death to life (vv. 11-12)
- *"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."*
 - **Verse 11 connects to vv. 9-10 by saying, *"In him also you"*.** What Paul does is continue out his argument of the effects of our union with Christ. By our participation with Christ we experienced the *"circumcision of Christ"* (v. 11) and we have participated in His death and resurrection through our faith in Him (v. 12).

- **Verse 11:** If being filled with the fullness of Christ is the enlarging of the heart of a Christian then the circumcision of Christ is the stripping off of the sinful flesh of the Christian's heart.
 - **Circumcision was the sign of the Old Covenant** with God's people whereby the male child had the flesh of the male member removed or some say stripped off. If you have ever witnessed the circumcision of male child it is not a pleasant event. It is in some ways a violent event where the flesh is cut and blood is spilled. The old sign of the covenant was only given to male children when they were eight days old.
 - **The old sign symbolized that God had bound Himself to His people to be their God**, their Redeemer who would never leave or forsake them. Likewise God's people, through the sign of the covenant given to the male child in each household, bound themselves to God to be His people to love Him with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength and to love their neighbors as themselves. It also was a call to be holy as God is holy by keeping His law and covenants.
 - The problem was that the old sign of the covenant did not give the people any power or ability to keep the law and covenants. It did not give them any ability to love God or their neighbors. It did not give them power to live holy lives.
 - **In addition to the outward sign of the covenant of circumcision in the Old Covenant, Yahweh also called His people to perform a spiritual circumcision their hearts.**
 - **Deuteronomy 10:12-20:** *"And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,"¹³ and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good?¹⁴ Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.¹⁵ Yet the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.¹⁶ **Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart**, and be no longer stubborn.¹⁷ For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.¹⁸ He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.¹⁹ Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.²⁰ You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear."*

In **Deuteronomy 10** we find the command not simply given as the sign of the covenant, circumcision, to male babies at eight days old but all of God's people were to take the sign of the covenant into their hearts. NOW . . . here was the problem—they had no ability to circumcise their hearts and God knew He had called them to obey a command they could not keep.

So . . . what does He do? He does it for them. Listen to **Deuteronomy 30:6** . . .
- **Deuteronomy 30:6,** *"And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."*

- **Now . . . enter Colossians 2:11.** The circumcision of the heart that is promised in Deuteronomy 30:6 is the **circumcision** that is a *circumcision that is made without hands* in **Colossians 2:11**.
- **This circumcision is a spiritual circumcision that accomplished** what the old sign of the covenant could not. The stripping off of the flesh of the heart. The spiritual power broke the power of sin over God's people and removed the penalty of God's that was on God's people. It essentially was the stripping off of the sin nature for the Christian.
- **How was this circumcision of the heart accomplished? By the "circumcision of Christ"**. This is one of those loaded phrases that has intense gospel meaning.

It is saying that our circumcision that removed the old sin nature and that held power over us was done, not by physical hands, but by the spiritual hands of the Holy Spirit. Yet the act of the spiritual circumcision was not just some clean, clinical spiritual event but instead it was purchased on the cross by the horribly violent crucifixion of Christ's when His flesh was stripped from His body because of our sin.

You see the stripping of the flesh from our hearts by the spiritual hands of Christ comes at the cost of the flesh of Christ's body being literally stripped, ripped and torn from His body by the beating and crucifixion He experienced because of our sin. His blood was spilled when His flesh was cut so that by the Spirit we can have the sign of the new covenant applied to our hearts.

Now the Holy Spirit spiritually circumcises our hearts because on the cross Jesus received the circumcision of His whole body in the wrath of God poured out on Him for our sin. Here is another way to say it: the violent wrath of God on sin was circumcised in the flesh of the physical body of Christ so that we may have fleshly sinful nature removed from our hearts.

- **Verse 12:** Just as spiritual circumcision is the stripping off of the fleshly nature in the heart so being buried with Christ in baptism and by faith being raised to life by the powerful working of God is the heart being made new. It is the raising of the dead heart.
 - **Verse 12 is an interesting verse.** It does not seem like Paul should raise the issue of baptism here. It seems like it does not fit. Think about it . . . he says "*having been buried with him in baptism*". It seems like he ought to say *being buried with him in death*.
 - **What is Paul's point when he likens baptism to death?** When we think of the connection between baptism and death we must think of the ordinance of baptism by immersion. That is the only way to have the connections between baptism and death. However, just to be clear, I think Paul is referencing baptism by the Spirit in this text but the reference is not without connection to the church ordinance of baptism by immersion. Here is what I mean . . .
 - **In the New Covenant circumcision is now spiritual and performed by the Holy Spirit** on heart of every believer and the *ordinance of baptism by immersion in water* is now the outward sign of those who are in the

New Covenant. Those who have had their hearts circumcised by the Holy Spirit receive the outward sign of baptism by immersion.

- **Baptism by immersion is how the believer displays an outward expression of that inner condition of** having had his or her heart raised from death to life by Christ.

Baptism's connection to death is that seen when a person goes under the water. This points to Christ's death and burial. Then when the person comes out of the water we see the resurrection. Just as Christ was raised from the dead so also the hearts of His people are brought to life. This is the connection between baptism and death.

- **Let me be clear about something . . . the physical ordinance of baptism that we administer as a church does not save.** It does not create new life, a new heart or kill the indulgences of the flesh. The ordinance of baptism is a picture of being raised from death to life. It is the picture of what has happened in a person's heart. It is a very important ordinance but it has no saving power.
- **The ordinance of baptism is the sign of New Covenant with Christ and His church.** Closely connected to this is the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is on-going celebration of that covenant with God is the Lord's Supper.

This is why we teach that you should be baptized before you take the Lord's Supper. *Baptism is the door*, so to speak, into the New Covenant with Christ and His church. The Lord's Supper continues that celebration and remembrance of being in covenant with God and His church.

- **In addition to this, the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper are the visual proclamation of the gospel.** When a person sees a baptism or sees the Lord's Supper they see with their eyes and hear with their ears the explanation of why we do these ordinances so they both see and hear the gospel.
- **What is it that we see when we witness a baptism? Well . . . now let's look back at v. 12 [read]. It is the picture of Jesus' death and resurrection.** Jesus lived a perfect life and then went to the cross for His people and died on the cross for their sins. He was buried and rose from the dead on the third day. In believer's baptism, a Christian identifies with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **Finally let me come back to the phrase *raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God* in v. 12.** *Faith* is in the powerful working of God who raised Him from the dead.
 - **Listen to me . . . it is not the power of your faith but faith in the powerful work God that raises a takes a** dead heart and raises it to life in Christ. It is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.
 - **Just a quick note here. The connection between faith and baptism is crystal clear.** God gives faith and we believe and are raised to life in Christ by having our hearts circumcised and by being baptized by the Spirit. After that we receive the sign of the New Covenant—baptism by immersion.

This is why we do not baptize infants. It is faith that God gives to repent and believe in Jesus Christ and this is why we baptize. Infants do not repent and believe in Christ.

- **Finally in vv. 11-12**, Paul was showing us the real power to stop the indulgence of the flesh is a circumcised heart by the Holy Spirit in the circumcision of Christ and having a dead heart brought to life by the powerful working of God through the gift of our faith.
- **Here's the application—Colossians 3:1**. After **Colossians 3:1** Paul is going to make lots of very practical application for this is where he was headed.

Application:

1. **I think one of the most obvious questions is to ask is:** have you been raised with Christ? Have you trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior by turning from your sin and to Jesus?
2. **Perhaps you are here this morning and you need to be baptized.** You have trusted Christ but you have never been baptized by immersion?
3. **What are you placing your faith in to stop the sinful indulgences of your flesh?** Are you trusting in your efforts or in the completed work of Christ on your behalf? You see you are saved by grace through faith and you are sanctified by grace through faith. Do not hear me say you do not put forth effort but the effort you put forward must be a grace-driven effort through faith in the work of Christ. Grace is not opposed to effort—it is opposed to earning. The false teachers in Colossae were teaching works in order to earn spiritual status and maturity.

Paul taught us that sin-killing power is only found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Here is the Apostle Paul's technique for killing sin or we can say it like he did "*stopping the indulgence of the flesh*" v.23).

Are you ready? This may be something you have never heard before. He explained in detail the person and work of Christ in the word of God. He helped them see the glory of God seen in the mystery of Christ to increase their faith so they were amazed and were left in stunned worship of the work of Christ on the cross for them. This is foundational before you do anything else.

If you jump to things to do to conquer sin without rehearsing the gospel of the One who conquered sin you simply rip the power of God out of whatever you are going to do.

Illst: Case in point—accountability with someone. If you are doing accountability to grow spiritually and overcome sinful habits that is a good thing. Perhaps you meet to ask hard questions of yourselves and really zero in on specific sins and you do this without rehearsing the gospel and being in awe of what Christ has done then you have turned your list of questions into a life-killing exercise in your own homemade laws.

Learn the gospel and all the implications that flow out of it. Remember who you are in Him. Your heart has been circumcised in order to break the power of sin's hold and you have been given a new heart and a new nature in Christ by being raised in Him. Pray that into your life and then live in line with this truth. Seek the grace of God and ask hard questions and make hard decisions about how to overcome sin but do not trust in your technique because it has no power to change you.

If you have been raised with Christ then seek the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on Him, His glory, His work, the nail-scarred hand, the blood-stained brow, the body that was broken for you and His resurrection from the dead.

Conclusion:

Lord's Supper:

The Lord's Supper is the ongoing sign of the covenant.

Blessing:

*May the LORD keep His everlasting covenant with you,
May He never stop doing good to you,
May He inspire you to fear Him,
May you never turn away from the LORD.
Amen.
Adapted from Jeremiah 32:40*