

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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Hold Fast to Christ!

(Col 2:2b-3 ESV) to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

“Full and Complete in Christ”

Jan 20, 2013

Sermon Text: Colossians 1:24 – 2:12

Scripture Reading: 1Sa 17:32-52

Introduction-

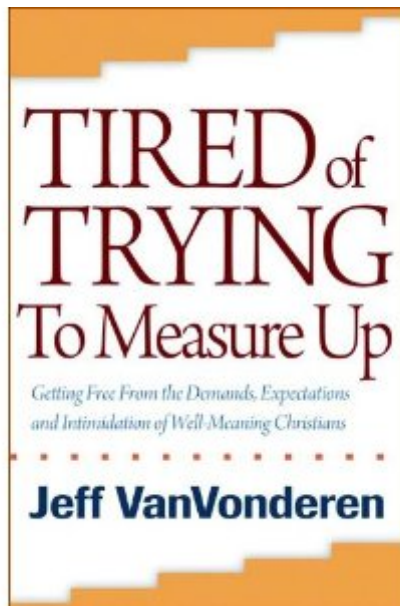
The big picture, the main theme of Colossians is this:

We have ALL things in Christ. He has reconciled us to God by His Cross. We are complete in Him. THEREFORE, we must never permit anyone to deceive us with some philosophy or doctrine that says we need more in order to know God or in order to please God. We are in Christ and Christ possesses everything. All wisdom, all knowledge, all deity.

You recall that we have used the false teachings of Adventism as a plain contemporary example of one of these deceptive philosophies that robs us of our joy and freedom in Christ.

However, we must also be on guard for “Christ + Something More” notions coming at us from many other directions, including in our own thinking. When this happens, the gospel, which is good news, becomes bad news. Heavy loads are put on us and we start thinking that we are performing for God as He sits and grades us, sometimes pleased with us but more often upset with us.

Let me highly recommend again the book I quoted from last week. Thanks to Valerie for pointing it out to me. I know someone who has been reading this book and they have already been quite powerfully impacted for the better.



Colossians is warning us about this whole idea of *trying to measure up*. And we all must admit that in our thinking, in our teaching and practice, we so easily slide into this notion – that God expects us to measure up. Shame and false guilt become the dynamics in such systems. A Christian is the prodigal come home, fully received by the Father, clothed in complete and perfect righteousness.

Now, as I mentioned last time, I want to be certain that we all learn very clearly the “big picture” of Paul’s

letter to the Colossians, and not just get immersed in details as so often happens. The details are important and we won’t ignore them entirely. For instance:

¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, (Col 1:19 ESV)

The *fullness of God*. What is that? This section is one of the key Scriptural statements of the Person and Nature of Christ, the God-Man and anyone who would know if, for instance, Christ is indeed God must come here. He is Creator. He is before all things. He holds the whole universe together by His power.

Colossians is filled with amazing doctrines like this and they are each one worthy of in-depth study.

We have seen Paul’s prayer for the Colossians in the opening verses of chapter 1, and we would do very well to pray these same things for ourselves and one another:

⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in

every good work and **increasing in the knowledge of God.** ¹¹ **May you be strengthened with all power,** according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

a bit – *the Power of Christ working in us:*

For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, (Colossians 1:29-1 ESV)

The Power of Christ

Did you notice that request: *strengthened with all power?* This is vital to understand, and so we will pause here. Here is one of the details! The POWER of Christ in us. Look at it. Paul prays that WE be strengthened with Christ's power so that we will *endure with patience and joy and thanksgiving to the Father.* Think about it.

How did Paul do what he did? How did he run that race to the end? The power of Christ in Him. *All the energy of Christ powerfully working in him.* Paul struggles (agonizes) through a great agony, energized by the energy of the One Who created the universe and upholds all things by His power. As one who knew this power, Paul prays that we have it too.

Here is more:

We are a little church. We are not strong. We don't have a huge bank account. We aren't the place where the great names of society come. And we have troubles. Burdens. It has cost us to follow Christ. How do we press on? Sometimes it seems like it is just too hard.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8 ESV)

Well, Paul tells us that the ONE who is all power – Christ – is ours. That HE is working in us so that we can do all He gives us to do and be all that He calls us to be. Let's follow this theme

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, **for my power is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I

am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. **For when I am weak, then I am strong.** (2 Corinthians 12:9-10 ESV)

that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be **strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,** (Ephesians 3:16 ESV)

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, **according to the power at work within us,** (Ephesians 3:20 ESV)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in **the strength of his might.** (Ephesians 6:10 ESV)

ESV **Philippians 4:13** I can do all things **through him who strengthens me.** (Phi 4:13 ESV)

This is pretty important stuff, right! If the One who created the universe from nothing, the One who holds all things together by His mere *word* – “*let there be*” – is in us, energizing us, working in us, then we do not need to look anywhere else for ANYTHING! We simply need to turn our eyes to Him and make our requests known to Him, and it will be ours.

- Power to overcome sin
- Power to endure in suffering
- Power to boldly speak for Christ in the face of resistance
- Power to love our enemies
- Power to keep on believing Christ when the whole world is calling God a liar
- Power to endure when it looks like the entire world is going to hell.
- Power to say no to temptation, even in its most seductive forms.

So, what is our course of action the next time we find ourselves thinking “I just can’t do this any longer”?

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. ⁹ "I know your tribulation and your poverty (**but you are rich**) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers

will not be hurt by the second death.' (Revelation 2:8-11 ESV)

We would love to have more people here every Sunday morning. It is a good thing to pray for. For unsaved people and for Christians to join us. We look at our resources and we can get discouraged. We think, where are the fruits of our labors?

But the power of Christ is not measured as man measures power. Smyrna looked poor – but they weren't. Christ's power is not measured nor limited by a checkbook balance or by the size of a crowd. David prevailed over Goliath. In fact, God works through weakness, not through man's power.

ESV 1 Corinthians 2:1 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.

² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling,

⁴ and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

⁵ so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1Co 2:1-5 ESV)

²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,

²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

³¹ so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1Co 1:25-31 ESV)

How often do we err in this? What is our measure of success and power? All through the Old Testament we find the very same principle – the power of God works through the weakness of man. It is the very same today. And so –

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now

live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20 ESV)

The POWER of Christ in us. Pretty important thing to understand! We have it all in Him. We must beware of detours that seem like they are the something “more” we think we need, or things that appear to be “powerful” but are actually not. David rejected Saul’s armor and so must we.

So Look to Christ and Don’t be Deceived

Let’s read right on through Colossians chapters 1-2 and as you listen, be sure that you hear the main theme. We want to get this so well that it stays with us, and whenever we think about Colossians, its main message jumps out at us. *We have Christ and therefore we have all that we need. Christ has already reconciled us to God and we are now His beloved sons. Christ leads us into a deeper and deeper knowledge of God. So never permit anyone to judge you and tell you that you need something “more” if you are going to really measure up in God’s sight.*

Colossians 1:1-2:23 ESV

(1) Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

(2) To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

(3) We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,

(4) since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,

(5) because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,

(6) which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing--as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,

(7) just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf

(8) and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Paul’s Prayer-

(9) And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

(10) so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good

work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

(11) May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,

(12) giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Christ's Completed Work-

(13) He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,

(14) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The Power of Christ

(15) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

(16) For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him.

(17) And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

(18) And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

(19) For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

(20) and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

We Have Been Reconciled

(21) And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,

(22) he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

(23) if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Paul's Gospel Ministry

(24) Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,

(25) of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,

(26) the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

(27) To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

(28) Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

(29) For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

(1) For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face,

(2) that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,

(3) in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Do Not Be Deceived

(4) I say this in order **that no one may delude you** with plausible arguments.

(5) For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order

and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

(6) Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,

(7) rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

(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.

(13) And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

(14) by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its

legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

(15) He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

(16) **Therefore let no one pass judgment on you** in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

(17) These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

(18) **Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels,** going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,

(19) and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

(20) If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, **why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations--**

(21) "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"

(22) (referring to things that all perish as they are used)--according to human precepts and teachings?

(23) These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in

promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, **but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.**

The main message is pretty clear, right? Paul repeats it over and over and over.

Every Christian must be on guard against forces that will try to move him off of Christ. These forces pass judgment against us, pronounce that we are lacking something and then propose a myriad of systems and do's and don'ts that are supposed to fill up our lack and make us more acceptable to God. We must reject them all and cling to Christ who is ALL.

Let me list some common ones by which "judgment is passed upon us" – (2:16).

- Reminding us of some past sin that God still somehow holds against us even though Christ as dealt with it,
- Shaming us for some failure or deficiency which we must correct somehow if we are to be accepted,
- Insisting that we follow a certain, specific method of Bible reading/prayer, etc

- “If you were really a Christian then you would....” (fill in the blank)
- I must _____ or God will not be pleased with me today.
- If you are not reformed, covenantal, premillennial... you are deficient.
- If you don’t sing a certain kind of hymn or psalm then God does not accept your worship.
- This is specifically what you must or must not do on Sunday/Saturday....
- You will wear a tie and suit coat to church, women will wear dresses, you will go out soul-winning on Wednesdays, you will go to this college and not that one.....
- This is specifically how you will give.
- This is how you must confess your sins.
- This is specifically how you must operate the details of your family life.

“If you are not doing what I am telling you to do, then God is not pleased with you.”

We are not to permit anyone to judge us in these ways –

Galatians 5:1 ESV (1) For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

We each one need to develop the strength and wisdom and ability, being ready at all times, to say –

“I am complete in Christ. You cannot judge me like that. I will not submit to your regulations and demands.

See to it! Let no one....! Do not submit to....”. This is the instruction of our King.

Now, those of you who have read the *Boundaries* book will be thinking – “well, this is where learning to set boundaries comes into play!” Exactly right.

Let me give you a current, sad, and very practical example of how dangerous it is for us to not heed Christ’s Word here, and what happens when we allow ourselves to be judged, to be shifted off of our certain hope in Christ AS WE ALREADY POSSESS HIM, and being deluded by some “do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, system.

Right now there is a very large lawsuit underway by a group of people who were part of a fairly large evangelical, reformed fellowship of churches. This

group seems to have started out well. We have even used some of their music in our worship – great stuff. But in this system, over time, church leaders became more and more dictatorial. So that they began to insist that the people in their churches do things as they directed, things that should have been left to individual conscience.

People were taught that they “must” operate in specific ways in their marriages and families, in dealing with their children, their finances, and so on. And when such dynamics get underway, they advance – and not for the better. So it was. As evil began to creep into these churches, it was covered up. The people were ordered to cover it up.

Listen to one lady, now out of that movement, as she expresses her sorrow –

I have had to go to the older kids and apologize for listening to these false teachers [that were] going against the instincts God wove into my heart because we were taught not to trust our instincts because our hearts were sinful and wicked.

She’s talking specifically about how parents were taught to raise their children in that group.

Still another woman, cruelly abused by her husband and church community (a literal community/commune) told me last week how she now sees how she was deluded with “plausible arguments” and taken captive by “philosophy and empty deceit” which was pressed upon her in the guise of Biblical truth, but was not.

It was eye-opening for me when I read that God has given me a "sound mind" or "good judgment" (2 Tim. 1:7). A few years ago, I was near-convinced that I was crazy (by my ex) . . . and compounding this was the church telling me not to trust my instincts or emotions. I have REALLY let that verse sink in. God said it -- my mind is sound and it is a gift from Him to me. In dreaming about my future counseling practice, I thought of calling it "sound mind counseling" because God's truth in that verse had such an impact on me.

Let me encourage all of us parents. We are all growing in Christ. We are continually seeing things that we did not see before. Inevitably we will be able to look back on how we did or did not do something, how we handled some situation with our spouse or children or some other person. And sometimes we will see that we were really pressing some system of “Christ + More upon them. It takes time for us to learn *grace*.

At those times, just as this first lady did, we can share these things with our friends and families. I have told my own children more than once – “I was too harsh with you in that situation. And I was too harsh because I did not know what I am learning now. Grace is a strange thing to us. For some reason, it is just very hard for us to get it through our heads that Christ is all and that in Him we have all. This free gift from God is difficult to wrap our minds around.

Finally, listen to Jeff VanVonderen give another illustration of how we must always be on guard against being taken captive by philosophy and empty deceit instead of holding fast to what we already are in Christ:

Not so long ago, our daughter, Erin, came upstairs with an urgent request. Her younger sister Callie had a pad of paper that Erin wanted. She wanted Mom to tell Callie to hand it over. "Is it yours?" my wife asked. "No." "Have you asked her if you could have it?" Holly continued. "No." "Then try asking Callie yourself," Holly suggested. "Maybe she'll decide to share it with you." Erin disappeared downstairs. I happened to be walking by just then and, as we listened at the top of the stairs, here's what we heard: "Mommy says you're supposed to give me that pad." Holly called Erin back upstairs: "I heard what you told your

sister. I feel very angry when you use my name to get your sister to do what you want her to do." Just about every child tries to do this-and so do most adults. When we feel that we don't have enough power on our own to make something happen, we try to "pull strings" with higher authorities. Since that event at home, I haven't been able to stop thinking about how it applies to "the family of Christians," that is, we who make up the church, the body of Christ. I've wondered if Christ becomes angry when Christians use His name to get others to do what they want. I'm afraid that a lot of terrible, wounding things are being done to God's people in His name. It seems that, more often than not, the spiritual issue with which my clients struggle isn't a question of whether or not there is a God. It's a matter of fearing that there is-and they're angry because of ways they've been treated by those who use His name. Most of our failure to love and trust God stems from our pictures of God as unlovable and untrustworthy. And most of our anger against Him is not really against the true God but against our unchristian or subchristian concepts of God.' God's Word has been used by others on His struggling people to instruct them-not to deal with their problems, but to act "spiritual" regardless of what's real ("fake it till you feel it"). Instead of offering broken people grace and rest, religious

systems have handed out standards of religious performance as their solution. Tired, wounded people have been offered religious formulas, not God's unconditional love and acceptance. Consequently, many times they're more tired and depressed than when they first sought the help.

Jeff VanVonderen. Tired of Trying to Measure Up (Kindle Locations 717-731). Kindle Edition.