

# 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.*

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***“Debt Free”***

**March 10, 2013**

**Sermon Text:** Colossians 2:11-15

**Scripture Reading:** Romans 2

### **Introduction-**

The Christian life is not easy. Jesus said that it entails denial of ourselves, dying to ourselves, taking up our own cross and following Him. Look at

Jesus. See where He trod and what He experienced in this world and you will have a good clue as to what you are in for if you truly belong to Him. But don't forget to take note of something else – in this denial of self, in this life of walking in Jesus' footsteps, you will find real life.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26 ESV)

2 Timothy 3:10-13 ESV

(10) You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness,

(11) my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra-which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.

(12) Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

(13) while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Would you believe that NO ONE ever taught me this in seminary? It was all hype and “positive” stuff. Not one single time did any professor every tell the students that if they followed Christ and were faithful pastors and Christians, they would be persecuted. We have all this talk of Jesus’ sufferings. We all know of how the Apostles were martyred. We have all read this:

2 Corinthians 11:24-33 ESV

(24) Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.

(25) Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea;

(26) on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers;

(27) in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

(28) And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

(29) Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

(30) If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

(31) The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

(32) At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me,

(33) but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

But how many times have we read it and realized “this will happen to me if I am a faithful servant of Jesus Christ.” Again, no one EVER stood before us in seminary and said, “Men, THIS is what you can expect if you are a faithful pastor and preacher of God’s Word.” Doesn’t that just boggle your mind? This neglect has to be intentional.

Look what kept Paul going though:

Philippians 3:13-21 ESV

(13) Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

(14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (15) Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

(16) Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

(17) Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

(18) For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

(19) Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

(20) But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

(21) who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Press on for the prize!! Lose everything now and you will have everything in the end.

And this is why it is soooo vital that we not permit anyone to disqualify us, to delude us, to take us captive by their distortions of the gospel that we have received. One of the common, contemporary delusions that will be

foisted upon a follower of Christ is that the “trouble” they are experiencing and the “trouble” they are causing is evidence that they are wrong. That Christ is not blessing them. That there would not be all of this trouble and all of this turmoil and all of this division in their earthly families or abandonment by friends, if they were really following Jesus.

Think about that. Look where Jesus walked. Consider Jesus’ experience. The things He endured. The suffering, the abandonment, the “trouble” he stirred up. How He incurred the displeasure of the high and mighty. Many professing Christians today would pronounce Him to be not very Christ-like! You see how subtle is the pressure upon us, how plausible the delusions. These are *precisely* the kinds of things every Christian should experience in this world that hates Christ. And yet such people are often spurned and rejected and rebuked by their “fellow” Christians today. Be careful. Be careful. Don’t be deluded. Don’t let anyone pass judgment upon you. Lest you be disqualified.

### **Carefully Consider What You Have**

Alright then, we have already seen that Paul’s primary method in keeping us from these delusions is to remind us of the glories that we ALREADY have in Christ. *Christian, there is NO*

*MORE work that needs to be done to make you more loved by God!* The thing is accomplished. And we seem to have great difficulty in comprehending this, don't we? Those old "elemental spirits of the world" that were our old way of thinking always add up to YOU MUST DO MORE IN ORDER TO BE ACCEPTED. But the grace of God in Christ does not consist of the basic building blocks of this world's thinking. Remember, ALL systems that are constructed, all philosophies that are founded upon the "elemental principles" of this world will ALWAYS lead to the conclusion that we must earn more. That somehow we must bring God into our obligation and merit so that he is required to save us.

And don't forget our lesson from last week in relation to this. If you are a person who is *entitled* in your thinking, if you are a person who is *unthankful and think that you are deserving*, then your thinking is still according to this world. What would you do, what could you do, to make God owe you salvation?

Listen again then as Paul reminds us what we already have in Christ:

Colossians 2:8-14 ESV

(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.

Let me make a note here before we proceed. I often make statements that are true about Christians. The Bible does that. I might say "you have everything in Christ." But please understand that this is true ONLY if you are in Christ. When I speak of "us" not needing to earn more, I mean those who are regenerate. I was

reminded to clarify this. Last week in the women's study as we were reading through Cloud and Townsend's book, *Boundaries*, we had to take note of some very bad theology in that book. This happens. Just as theologians can forget about practical, real-life matters, so psychologists and counselors can forget about theology! They made this statement:

*“God forgave the world, but the whole world is not reconciled to Him. Although He may have forgiven all people, all people have not owned their sin and appropriated His forgiveness. That would be reconciliation. Forgiveness takes one; reconciliation takes two.”*

Now, whether you are a Calvinist or an Arminian, this is VERY bad theology. God has not forgiven the world. Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, but whatever that means it surely cannot mean *God has forgiven all people*.

If you are here this morning then, apart from Christ, God has not forgiven you and your sins are counted against you. And all of these things that we are about to look at which are true for Christ's people, are not true for you. And thus your DESPERATE need to turn from your own way and humbly ask Christ to show you mercy.

But let's consider what Christ's own people possess IN FULL . That is, after all, what vss 9- 10 mean:

Colossians 2:9-10 ESV

(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.

All that God IS, dwells bodily in Jesus. This Jesus who came into this world, born as a baby, was and is the fullness of God. All of God's attributes. All of God's essence – whatever God IS, Christ IS. And therefore when Jesus forgives us, when Jesus accepts us, GOD forgives and accepts us. WE HAVE BEEN FILLED IN HIM. Filled with all that God has to offer us, and then some! Our cup runs over:

Ephesians 1:3-8 ESV

(3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

(4) even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love

(5) he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

(6) to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

(7) In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,  
(8) which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight

Nothing else to earn, right? The King of the universe has done it. No one owns something that He doesn't. ALL is His to give, and He has given it.

**NOTE:** So what are you looking for, Christian? You are miserable. Why? Someone would not give you something? Someone doesn't like you. Someone didn't commend and praise you. Why do you go along thinking that you "need"? It is because we don't grasp what we have and who we are NOW in Christ. When you see what Christ has for you in the New Creation, which He has already given you title to, you are going to (if regret will be in heaven – probably not), kick yourself!!

1 Corinthians 2:9 ESV

(9) But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"--

### 1. True Circumcision

In the OT, literal, physical circumcision – the circumcision "made

with hands," was a picture of the new birth of regeneration. The removal of fallen, sinful, fleshly, hard hearts and the giving of a new heart, effecting a new person. Even the OT explained this:

Ezekiel 11:17-21 ESV

(17) Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.'

(18) And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations.

(19) And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,

(20) that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

(21) But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, declares the Lord GOD."

And again –

Ezekiel 36:23-28 ESV

(23) And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

(24) I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.

(25) I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

(26) And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

(27) And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

(28) You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

It is this matter of the NEW heart that is connected with the imagery of circumcision in the NT –

Romans 2:28-29 ESV (28) For no one is a Jew who is merely one

outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.

(29) But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

You see it then. This is the thing Paul means here in verse 11 –

Colossians 2:11 ESV

(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,

THIS is the circumcision of Christ. It is effected by His Spirit through faith. It is the thing John meant-

John 1:12-13 ESV

(12) But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

(13) who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

This “putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ” has ALREADY happened! It happened when you were joined to Christ and His death and burial became your death and burial. That is what Paul means here in verse 12 –

Colossians 2:12 ESV

(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.

The specifics of this verse are difficult. Many pages have been written about how vs 11-12 connect the circumcision of Christ with baptism, and thus the entire issue of believer's vs infant baptism is brought in. Largely I am going to leave these specifics alone so that we can keep our focus on the main thing Paul is emphasizing here.

I can give you my opinion here about "baptism" in verse 12. I think that the context of vs 11-14 emphasize to us the glorious blessings we possess, and that we possess them because of Christ's burial and resurrection which laid the way open to faith in Christ being the channel through which the mighty power of God effects the new birth in us. And therefore I would conclude that "baptism" here means "identification with" Christ. The joining to Christ however by faith logically precedes the circumcision/new birth. And this means, in my opinion, that unless a person has exercised genuine faith in Christ, this joining to Christ has not occurred, the new birth has not

occurred, circumcision of Christ has not occurred, and thus to baptize an infant is to get the cart before the horse. Water baptism could be in Paul's meaning here as well, but only as it would be an outward symbol of an inward work of heart circumcision that has occurred because of a "baptism" or joining with Christ.

Let's carefully consider however that Paul's use of "baptism" here surely WILL bring Christians to think of their water baptism as well. Thus, *the New Testament assumes that every Christian has been baptized in water.* You see the same thing in Paul's use of baptism in Romans 6. If you are a Christian, and you have not been baptized, then you must understand that your condition is *abnormal* in the thinking of the NT.

But let's leave off that topic and keep the primary thing in view here.

YOU have been raised up with Christ. YOU were buried with Him and raised with Him THROUGH FAITH by the powerful power of God.

***"Christian, the very same power that God raised Christ from the dead with has been, through faith, set off in you like a mighty life-giving explosion."***

And this is what Paul means as he continues –

Colossians 2:13 ESV (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,

See? He is summing it up. Circumcision/regeneration and resurrection! The uncircumcised, hostile, fleshly person we were. The old man who was ruled and characterized by sin and trespasses of God's Law, THAT person was dead before God. But God took that dead person and buried him with Christ and raised him up, making him alive with Christ. And the result - *the forgiveness of all our trespasses.*

That leads us into verse 14 which explains how this forgiveness was also effected on the cross:

Colossians 2:14 ESV  
(14) by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

This is the gospel. This is a tremendous thing that if we would just get hold of our entire attitude would change. Consider:

1. There WAS a "record of debt."
2. That recorded debt "stood against us."

3. The debt possessed "legal demands."

I have never been in serious trouble with the law. I got a ticket once when I was 17, but I have never had to stand in a court room as a defendant. I have seen defendants in court and I have testified against many of them. And I can tell you, it is a sobering thing to stand before the law and hear charges of wrongdoing read against you. "*That on such and such a date in the county of \_\_\_\_\_ in the State of Oregon, John Smith did willfully and knowingly...*".

And then to be pronounced guilty and sentenced to some punishment. It is a very sobering setting.

And it is *criminal*.

Civil proceedings have courtrooms as well, but they do not involve crimes. They deal with what are called "torts" and they can be paid for. If you are sued by someone, you will not be found guilty of a crime, but a judgment of some monetary amount will be levied and you will have to pay it. All will be well when you do.

Not so in criminal court. At least in the more serious crimes. You can't pay a fine and be all in the clear if you have murdered someone or robbed a bank. No, YOU are going to have to

receive due penalty *upon your own person*. It might be imprisonment, or even death. You can't buy your way out of it. The penalty will be received in your own person.

The moment every one of us was born into this world, we were guilty of high crimes. And true to the fallen nature of our natural, sinful hearts, we proved that we were of that first Adam. We rebelled against God. We hated His Law. God's Law stood against us, condemning us and this is what Paul means by "the record of debt that stood against us." ALL of it has been canceled (see vs 13 – "having forgiven us ALL our trespasses). Listen to Douglas Moo's comment here:

*"Paul's first word picture portrays a document that all human beings have signed, an 'IOU' in which we pledge complete allegiance to God. [I owe God obedience to His will. Signed, Mankind.] Our sins stand as conclusive evidence that we have failed to give God that allegiance, and so that document is 'against us' and 'condemns' us. But God has taken that document and wiped it clean; indeed, he has take it completely out of the picture. He has, in fact, in a second word picture that both highlights the completeness of the removal and the means by which it was accomplished, 'nailed it to the cross.' The third stanza of Horatio Spafford's*

*hymn 'It is Well With My Soul,' beautifully captures the point of this verse:*

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!*

*My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it now  
more,*

*Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, O my  
soul!*

The verb "by canceling" means literally "to cause to disappear by wiping," as in the Lord one day in the New Creation wiping away every tear. Here we have the "blotting out" of the sin record. Listen to what surely must be a parallel in Ephesians (and which adds more detail yet)-

Ephesians 2:14-17 ESV

(14) For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility

(15) by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,  
(16) and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

(17) And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

The Old Testament concept is often rendered “to blot out.” For example –

Psalms 51:1 ESV

(1) To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

Isaiah 43:25 ESV

(25) "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

Isaiah 44:22 ESV

(22) I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.

Acts 3:19 ESV

(19) Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out,

And the same theme comes in different wording as well –

Micah 7:18-19 ESV

(18) Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.

(19) He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

This is what has been accomplished in Christ. And do not miss HOW it was done –

*“This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”*

A certificate of debt was not nailed to the cross! Jesus Christ was. What Paul is telling us in this word picture then is that Christ became that debt. Christ took upon Himself our debt, paid for it by undergoing the curse it required of us, and thus blotted out what was owed. Justice was met and satisfied. This was no “oh, just forget it, you don’t have to pay me back.” No. As Paul reminds us in Romans 3, God had to remain just, even in justifying those who have faith in Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

Colossians 2:15 ESV

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

Whenever I read this verse, I think of two things –

1. The possible parallel in Ephesians 4 “he led captivity captive”
2. The scene in the closing of the Lord of the Rings when Frodo finally gets the ring thrown into the fires of Mordor and all the evil kingdom disintegrates.

Paul is very possibly refuting an aspect of the Colossian heresy here by reminding the believers there that Christ is above ALL. That there is NO human or spiritual being that has not been defeated by Christ, and therefore none that has any power over us. Listen to this commentator once again –

*“This idea of public display is strongly accented with the [Greek] participle thriambeusas which alludes to the Roman custom of awarding victorious generals a victory parade. Behind the general as the rode in splendor through the city would follow, in chains, prisoners from the successful campaign just concluded.... Paul is pulling out all the stops to make as clear as he can that God has removed any claim that the spiritual powers might have over us, and that he has done so clearly and publicly.”*  
(Douglas Moo)

There is irony here. Jesus was stripped naked at the cross and put to open

shame. Satan and his powers must have been in great glee. But what they didn’t realize is that as they were watching what looked like their ultimate triumph, Frodo and Sam were sneaking back behind them into the mountain! In His very death on the cross, in the mocking and shaming, Jesus was actually the Victor.

And that victory was openly declared when? At the resurrection and the ascension. There is a probable connection here with what Peter says –

1 Peter 3:18-22 ESV  
 (18) For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,  
 (19) in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,  
 (20) because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.  
 (21) Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,  
 (22) who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with

angels, authorities, and powers  
having been subjected to him.

It still appears that in this world evil is winning. It isn't. It is defeated. Satan and his hordes know it. They remember very well the day they were cast out of heaven by the cross, stripped and led in shameful procession for all to see.

And so it is, in any great story that there seems to be no hope at all. That nothing is ever going to change and that evil and darkness will have the day. But it isn't going to turn out that way. We know the ending.

You say you see no hope,  
You say you see no reason we should dream,  
That the world would ever change,  
You're saying love is foolish to believe.

Because there will always be some crazy,  
With an army or a knife,  
To wake you from your day dream  
And put the fear back in your life.

But look, if someone wrote a play just to glorify what is stronger than hate,  
Would they not arrange the stage to look as if the hero came too late?

He's almost in defeat,  
It's looking like the evil side will win,

So it seems, on the edge of every seat,  
From the moment the whole play begins... [David Wilcox]

And then comes Christ. He made just such a victorious entry once, and He is going to make another – one more time. And this one, this one is going to be the end of a story to beat all others.