

May 24, 2020

The Supremacy of Christ over Temptation

Colossians 2:16-3:4

Those who are “in Christ” are able to shatter temptation by decisively occupying their minds with His glory.

LTS: Rom. 6:1-11

This morning I want to talk with you about a very practical issue; namely, how to conquer temptation. The objective reality that God now views us as identified completely with Christ does not mean that Christians are no longer tempted to sin. In fact, when Jesus lived among his people as the perfect man, he too was tempted. The author of Hebrews is unmistakable on this point when he say “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Heb. 4:15).

We also know from the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew that Jesus was even tempted directly by Satan Himself. Nevertheless, he never gave into those temptations. How did he do it? The text clearly reveals that Jesus responded to the tempter by drawing upon the power of Scripture. For example, knowing that Jesus was hungry after 40 days of fasting in the wilderness, he tempted him to use his divine powers to turn stones into bread. Christ responds from Deut. 8, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” With each temptation Jesus has a scriptural response. But how should we respond to temptation? Better yet, how can we weaponize Scripture in our own defense to resist the devil, to flee youthful lusts, to successfully take our stand against the appeal of the world, the flesh, and the devil? Paul is going to offer us a very practical and powerful strategy. But before we go there, we need to finish last weeks message.

Let’s take a moment to refresh on the passage we studied last time. Stand with me now in honor of God’s word and follow along as I read.

Read Col. 2:16-3:4

Last week we were introduced to some of the deceptions the false teachers were selling in 1st Century Colossae. Their message was simple enough; namely, that in religion, Jesus Christ is a fine starting point, but if you really want to flourish as a Christian, you need more. What exactly did they suggest believers needed?

Well, first of all, they suggest we need various forms of religious sanctimony or religious practices that make one morally superior. The text clearly identifies four such sanctimonious practice. They include..

- A. First (2:8), they offered Humanism or man-made religious tradition
- B. Second (2:16), they recommended Legalism borrowing from the ceremonial laws of Judaism.
- C. Third (2:18) they suggested Mysticism which included worshiping angels and having visions.
- D. Finally, the advocated Asceticism, which called for severe self-denial, even to the point of self-injury.

Now, these religious leaders would probably argue that they were not departing from true orthodox Christianity. They would likely defend their extra-biblical practices by submitting that their only concern was fullness of Christian flourishing. Nevertheless, we know that adding to Christ – no matter the intention – is an affront to the gospel itself and tends to draw people away from Christ rather than drawing them deeper into fellowship with Christ.

Paul's fear was clearly that some might be drawn back into their old way of life. Witness the veiled warning (1:22-23) where he tells us that God has reconciled you... If you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not moved away from the gospel that you have heard."

Paul's concern was that perhaps somehow these false teachings would tempt certain members of the church to drift away from the gospel of the all-sufficient Christ.

3. How should those who are united to Christ think about Humanism, Legalism, Mysticism and Asceticism? We should think of them as Paul did. And he said that they are nothing more than ...

II. Obsolete Shadows:

1. No doubt the false teachers would argue that their added traditions and practices are authenticated by the fact that so many of them were grounded in the O.T. law. But before they can make their case, Paul issues a response. Namely, that Christians should not submit to judgements against them that are based on O.T. ceremonial law because (16) they are but a shadow of what was to come.
2. Christ, however, is the substance. The shadows only serve to point to the substance. With the coming of Christ and the proclamation of his gospel, Christ is available to all who believe. Those ceremonial laws are now obsolete.

3. Hebrews chapter 10 verse 1 expresses an almost identical idea. There we read:

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never ... make perfect those who draw near.”

4. Then, in the verses that follow, Christ’s atoning death on the cross is spoken of as the ultimate sacrifice to which all the O.T. sacrifices could only point. They were the shadows, but Christ is the substance.

III. Authentic Substance:

1. Jesus alone is God’s authentic substance.

- A. What do sinners need for salvation? Christ alone.
- B. What do Christians need for Sanctification? Christ alone.
- C. What do you need for Christian flourishing? You need Christ alone.

2. Now don’t misunderstand. When I say “Christ alone” I’m not discounting the church. For she is the body of Christ. Nor am I depreciating the Scriptures, for they are the Word of Christ. Additionally, I am not disregarding Baptism or the Lord’s supper, for these are the Ordinances of Christ.

3. The false teachers were distorting the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ. While professing that their teachings and practices were for enhancing Christian experience, they were really only obscuring the sufficiency of Christ. They were putting what man has made in the place of God. No wonder Paul concludes by telling us (v. 23), These [things] 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.”

4. Jesus Christ is the Substance of our faith, NOT a religious shadow. He is not the absence of something. He is the presence of something and the source of Everything. For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you, Christian, are full in him. You need none of those phony-baloney, man-made, sanctimonious philosophies and traditions. They are mere shadows, but the substance belongs to Christ.

5. Thus concludes, last week’s sermon. It also concludes our study of the second chapter of Colossians. But I must confess that I find the chapter break here to be rather unhelpful, because in chapter 3 Paul merely continues his train of thought. Let’s take a moment to read the next four verses.

Read 3:1-4

6. It's important to note that the last words of chapter 2 leave us hanging. Paul ends the chapter by telling us that Humanism, Legalism, Mysticism and Asceticism cannot enable us to subdue the flesh. They are not effective for battling temptation. So, what are we to do? I think Paul tells us in these four verses.

7. First, notice with me that Paul appeals to us as those whose resurrection had already occurred. At first blush, this may seem strange, because in order to be raised one must first have died, and yet, here we are, sitting in our pews very much alive. And this may continue to seem strange until someone points out that three verses earlier (2:20) Paul appeals to us as though we indeed have already died.

- (2:20), “If you have died with Christ...”
- (3:1) “If you have been raised with Christ.”

8. You may rightly ask, “But, when did I die?” The way God thinks of you, you died when Jesus died. When was I raised? God says, When Christ was raised.

9. Once again, beloved, Paul is appealing to the doctrine of our Union with Christ. The common metaphor of Scripture is that when you received Jesus Christ your old self died and your new self was resurrected to new life: life In Christ. The old has passed away, the new has come.

10. This metaphor is so significant that as Jesus was about to ascend into heaven, he commissioned his followers to “make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and H.S.” Baptism, the act of being completely immersed in water and brought into the air is again as a picture of our dying with Christ and being raised with Him to walk in new life.

11. Significantly, Paul tells us in Rom. 6 (the passage we read at the beginning of the service) that when we died with Christ, we died to sin. He says, “Sin shall no longer have dominion over you.” But how does that work out practically? This brings us to...

IV. Defeating Temptation:

1. Before we dive into this question let me share why I believe it's relevant to this text. First, I think that battling temptation is within the interpretive range of this text because the verse immediately before it points out that the religious inventions of the false teachers were “of no value against fleshly indulgence.” I take that to mean that they viewed their religious traditions and practices, at least in part, as a means of subduing the flesh. Paul says, those things don't work!

2. Second, I think Paul is giving us a means of defeating temptation because the verse immediately after this section (v.5) speaks explicitly about the need to “put to death what is earthly in you.” Then he specifically names no less than 10 sins.

3. So how should Christians approach defeating temptation? Think about it like this. When you were living in unbelief, it’s as though you were married to sin. And because you were married to sin you always submitted to sin’s impulses and abuses. Sin always promises freedom and happiness, but in the end all it always delivers brokenness and bondage. You were hopelessly bound to sin and, whether you knew it or not, it would eventually kill you.

4. But one day you heard the good news of Jesus Christ and you believed that He NOT only had the authority to rescue you from such bondage, but that He actually delighted to do so. In fact, he was determined to set you free because of his great love for you.

5. On that very day, you repented and believed. Your repentance (to continue with the analogy) was the equivalent of divorcing sin. And your faith was the equivalent of marrying Christ. Now, as the bride of Christ, you are no longer under sin’s abusive authority. Now you are free, loved, and protected and abundantly cared for as if you were Christ’s very body. Moreover, all his blood-bought benefits are now your inheritance. He will never leave you or forsake you. Your marriage to him can never be broken. Married to Christ, sin no longer has dominion over you.

6. Someone will say, “But wait! If this is true, why am I still so often tempted to sin?” Well, just because you are divorced from sin doesn’t mean he won’t show up at your door from time to time and make demands of you. It doesn’t mean he won’t come to your new home pleading with you to return. He will still try to entice you in hopes of enslaving you once again. The question is, how do you defeat sin’s temptation when it comes knocking at your door?

7. I heard this week of a businessman who was asked how he is able to remain faithful to his marriage even though he frequently traveled for business. The man replied, “If ever I find myself the least bit tempted, I reach into my briefcase where I have a photograph of my beautiful wife who has been my faithful companion these 30+ years. I look at that photo and remind myself how wonderful it is to be married to such a woman, how delightful it is to share life with her and freely fellowship with her. That, my friend, is all I need.”

8. How do you defeat temptation? Paul says, “If you have been raised with Christ” [i.e. married to Christ], seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on the things that are on the earth. For you have died [your marriage to sin is over] and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”

9. I think the two most important things you can do to battle the enticements of temptation to sin are, First, to fellowship with Christ daily and frequently.

A. The word “Seek” (1) is better rendered “keep seeking.” It’s a present, active command. Keep seeking, keep seeking, and keep on seeking things above where

Christ is.

- B. And where is Christ? He is (metaphorically speaking) seated on the right hand of God (3:1)." That is, seated in the position of all authority over heaven and earth. And you are seated with Him if you are in Him. That means, everything you need to battle temptation is readily available. You don't have to order it on amazon and hope it arrives on time. No! You are "married to Christ" and everything that is his is already yours.

- C. So, keep seeking [and NEVER STOP SEEKING] things that are above.

10. The most important part of battling temptation is what you do when you're NOT being tempted. Do you fellowship with Christ regularly? Are you enjoying the benefits of being married to Christ? The Christian life is NOT First of all about doing. It's first of all about delighting. The greatest command in the bible is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart." Actively loving and experiencing the love of Christ is the most important part of your salvation! But such love must be cultivated by the proper means and by extended time.

11. The second most important thing you can do to battle the enticements of temptation is to meditate on the glory of His Person.

- A. Paul says (2) "Set your mind on things above. "Set" is also an active imperative. It means "to ponder, to let one's mind dwell on, to meditate on something," namely, Christ.
- B. When you find yourself tempted to sin, dig into the briefcase of the word of God and draw out the "photograph" of the one to whom you are now "married." Remind yourself of his glory, his character, his love, his faithfulness, his gentleness, his mercy, his power.
- C. Bat away fresh enticements with fresh reflection on his deity, his sacrifice, his resurrection, his ascension, his saving purposes, his authority over angels both holy and demonic. And the list goes on and on.

12. How do you actively set your mind on things above in the battle against temptation? We do it like Jesus did. We use Scripture. We forcefully turn our minds to Scriptures that reveal the glory of Christ and we hold our mind there till the battle is won.

13. Would you like an example of such Scripture? We needn't turn very far from our text. We can turn back one page and meditate on Col. 15-20,

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.

14. One reason why Christians are so often defeated by temptation is because they fail to seek the things above when they're NOT being tempted. And because they are not seeking Christ when they're NOT being tempted, they find themselves ill-equipped for battle when they are being tempted.

15. But the problem is NOT merely a lack of fellowship with Christ in heavenly things. It's also that we spend so much time dabbling with earthly things, many of which are lawful and enjoyable, but which frequently and subtly turn our affections away from Christ. And then, when old sin comes knocking at our door, enticing and making demands, our hearts are unprepared, and we are unarmed for the battle.

16. So beloved, let this be a call to Scripture memory and meditation. May it be a call to deeper and daily fellowship with Christ. And by God's grace, may we enjoy the benefits of walking in a manner worthy of our Union with Christ – for His glory and for our Joy.

Those who are “in Christ” are able to shatter temptation by decisively occupying their minds with His glory.