

The Total Package Gospel

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to the book of Colossians...

Review: Jesus is Supreme over all and Sufficient for all that we need

Intro

My family went camping overnight this past Friday night down at Shades State Park about an hour from here. It was just one night, we took off after school and came back yesterday. We've enjoyed some camping in the past, and we had a great time. The weather was perfect. It's a beautiful part of the year to spend time outdoors, especially in the woods, cooking food over a fire.

But before we can enjoy that time away, we first have to pack. We have to get everything ready so that we aren't missing any essential items when we're away from civilization. So we pack our bags and totes and fill the van with the gear that we'll need for the trip. And my wife and I are having that continual conversation – did you remember to pack the potholders? Did you grab the coffee? Things like that.

We don't want to have that feeling – you've probably felt it yourself – when you're down the road and you think...uh oh. I'm missing something. There's something off.

And sure enough, we had that feeling that we were missing something. This time it wasn't anything major – just some cough syrup for our kids. And we weren't so far down the road that weren't able to stop and pick some up.

It's essential to be well equipped if you're heading out into the unknown or going someplace with a specific purpose – like hiking or camping.

Some of you who played video games as a kid, may remember this screen from the Legend of Zelda. (show picture)

It says, "It's dangerous to go alone! Take this."

And the old man gives the player a wooden sword which he'll need to defeat his enemies. You need this or you'll be in trouble.



I think for many of us in the Christian life, we may at times get that feeling of panic like we've forgotten something or we're missing something. It seems like everyone else must have something we don't have. What I have is not enough.

Or we feel the danger of the journey like Link does in the Legend of Zelda, and we feel like we're alone and defenseless against our enemies and their accusations.

So maybe you've felt that feeling or have felt the temptation to try to pursue some secret knowledge or additional revelation or some worldly philosophy to really get what it is that feels like it's missing.

From time to time, I'll talk with people who have walked away from the faith or been led astray into other false religions or even cult-like beliefs. And there is usually some element of this kind of thinking – I just thought that there had to be more. Jesus wasn't enough. The church was too hypocritical. There wasn't any power there. I wasn't able to be me. I still struggled with sin and guilt and doubts.

People we know have been led astray and taken captive by the empty philosophies of human tradition and the elemental spirits, asking questions like: Am I missing something in life? Am I alone? Can I truly change? Will my sin one day catch up with me? Are the accusations of my enemies eventually cause my ruin?

These questions are not new to us or to people who alive today. They're the same kind of questions that people have wrestled with for centuries. In fact, I want to suggest that these kinds of questions may have been in Paul's mind when he wrote this letter to the believers he had never met in Colossae. He knows that they have real questions, real struggles. He knows that it's dangerous to go alone. So he writes to remind them what they have in Christ. He wants to tell them how they've been fully packed and equipped for the Christian life. They have all that they need in Jesus for the road ahead.

That's what we see here. We're picking up in the middle of a paragraph, so I want to back up and read this whole passage.

Read Colossians 2:8-15

Let's pray...

So the question Paul wants to address for his readers is this – how have you been equipped for the Christian life so that no one takes you captive by empty philosophy?

What is in your ‘salvation backpack’ so to speak that will help you stay rooted and walk in Him? What have you been given and what has Christ done for you? That’s our passage today.

Later in this book, Paul will unpack these truths and apply them to our everyday lives. That’s where we’re going on this journey. Look ahead with me at chapter 3...

Colossians 3:1-3

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2** Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. **3** For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Colossians 3:5

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Colossians 3:12

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...

Paul’s going to get to the application for these truths in chapter 3. And he’s going to base them on what he says here in chapter 2. You should set your mind on things above – because your life is in Christ and that’s where He is. You should put these sinful practices to death because you’ve died to those things through the death of Christ. You should put on Christ-like behaviors and attitudes because you’ve been raised with Him to new life. The gospel truths of chapter 2 lead to the applications in chapter 3.

So that’s where we’re going in the weeks to come, but before we get there, we need to look in our salvation backpack and see what God has provided for us for the journey. And we’ll talk about how these things keep us from being taken captive by empty philosophy.

Before Frodo and his friends depart from the wood elves in the Lord of the Rings, they are given gifts for the journey that will help them on their way. They end up needing

each one according to divine providence. So what are the gifts that we have been given through the work of Christ?

I think there are five things in this paragraph. But Pastor Mike already walked us through the idea from verse 10 that we've been filled in Christ, in whom all the fullness of God dwells in a human body. That the first thing we've been given – the fullness of Christ. If you want to know more about that, go listen to last week's message. It was a good. Okay, one down, four to go...

Spiritual transformation

The second item in our salvation backpack is spiritual transformation. Christians have been radically transformed from the inside out. The Christian is a person who has died to the old man through the death of Christ. That's what's going on with all of this circumcision language. Look at verse 11...

Colossians 2:11

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 a sort of odd thing to say to another person, isn't it? By the way, you were circumcised – yes, I'm talking about you.

So what does he mean and why does he use this language?

I'm not going to be too graphic here, I hope, but you need to understand the basic concept of circumcision for this verse to make sense.

Circumcision was a practice instituted by God way back in history when He commanded that Abraham be circumcised and circumcise his male offspring in Genesis 17. God made this command for a kind of surgery to take place with the male infants in which his foreskin would be stripped off or cut away. It's a sensitive procedure on a sensitive part of the body. (I talked to the other pastors about making a joke here, and they advised against it, so I'm not.)

The point of circumcision was so that God's people would be set apart from the other nations. God had made covenant promises to them as a people, and so they were to be

holy and distinct from the world around them, and circumcision was a sign of their distinction.

That's what circumcision was intended to be – a sign of the covenant. It's a pointer, a symbol of a spiritual reality which goes deeper than the surface level removal of flesh.

And that's the way it's described later in the biblical story. So we read in places like Deuteronomy 10 that God's people were to circumcise the foreskin of their hearts and be no longer stubborn. They are to keep all of God's commands and cut off their sinful ways.

But the people were not able to do that. So God gives a prophecy in Deuteronomy 30, and he tells them that He Himself will circumcise their hearts when they repent. That is, He will strip away the sinfulness and stubbornness of their hearts. He will change them from the inside out. That was what circumcision pointed to all along – the putting off of the old, sinful way and being set apart as God's covenant people.

So now, Paul will say in Colossians – this is what has happened to you! What circumcision pointed to has now happened. God has fulfilled His promise in Deuteronomy 30 and circumcised your hearts through the death of Jesus. Jesus was stripped of His flesh; it was put off of Him so that you would die to the old, sinful ways of your past. Yours is a spiritual circumcision – that's why he says it was without hands. It wasn't a physical circumcision when you died to your sins.

So let me try to say clearly what I think is going on here: The physical circumcision of Christ in His death means that you have been spiritually circumcised. There has been a spiritual transformation. The old has died and is gone and the new has come.

This is what it means to be saved. You and I will need this reality in our Christian life and our battle with sin. We need to know that the old, sinful flesh has been put off. It has been put to death.

The implications are huge here for those of us who still struggle with sin. Anyone here like that? This means that sin no longer has free reign in our lives. We do not have to

sin. The habits of our sinful flesh should be put to death in our lives because Christ put them to death when He was crucified.

What is that sin that just plagues you – that you just can't seem to stop? And you get frustrated and angry when you do it? And you feel the guilt and the shame every time? Christ has put that sin to death. You have died to that.

So now, walk in Him. Journey on, knowing that this is in your 'salvation backpack' – spiritual transformation.

New life in Christ

The third item in our salvation backpack is this – new life in Christ. Paul now switches up the imagery from circumcision to baptism.

To be baptized is to be immersed. Paul is speaking here of the practice of baptizing believers according to the command of Jesus in Matthew 28. When a person repents of their sin and trusts in Jesus, he or she is to be baptized as the first act of obedience, publicly showing on the outside what has happened on the inside.

Like circumcision is a physical sign showing the putting off of the flesh and being joined to God's covenant promises, baptism symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of a believer in union with Christ's, death, burial and resurrection.

That's what Paul is referring to in verse 12... **Colossians 2:12** 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.

Believers have been united with Him – with Jesus, in our baptism. Just as Christ died and was raised again, so we who are in Christ have been raised with Him when we put our faith in Him.

And notice that the same powerful working of God which raised Jesus from the grave is the same power that raised you up from the grave.

That's why we sing, "Oh praise the one who paid my debt and raised this life up from the grave." God raised Christ, and He has raised you if you are in Him through faith.

Paul continues in verse 13...

Colossians 2:13

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him,

So we were dead and uncircumcised in our flesh. We were spiritually lifeless, but then God did something. Through the work of Jesus on the Cross, without our intervention or involvement at all, God gives us new life through union with Jesus. He has made us alive, resurrected with Him.

So now we have new life in and through Jesus. Our life is not like it was before, when we were spiritually dead and uncircumcised in our flesh, back when we were chasing our idols and the lusts of our flesh. Now we have been made alive in Jesus. This is where life is found – don't be taken captive by other things which promise real life. You have been made alive in Him.

So far Paul has argued that we have been filled in Him, we've been spiritually transformed, and we've been given new life in Him. Now, the fourth thing in our backpack...

Full forgiveness

Look again at verses 13 and 14...

Colossians 2:13-14

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.

Paul's point here is that when God saved you, he made you alive through forgiving you of all your trespasses. He forgave us **all** our trespasses. That is a wonderful reality to just consider. I hope that's something that you do regularly – remind yourself of this truth.

All of our sins – the sins of your past, the sins in your life right now, and all the sins you will commit. The sins you remember and the ones you don't. He forgave them all.

How? How did Jesus do that?

Verse fourteen says that He cancelled the record of debt that stood against us when He nailed it to the Cross.

The idea here is that our sins incur a debt. You may hear of a someone who has been convicted of a crime needed to do community service to pay the debt they owe society. The crime brings a debt with it. Well, in the Roman Empire, when someone was convicted of a particularly grievous offense that called for execution by crucifixion, that person's offense was written on a sign which was placed over his head.

Remember the sign that was placed over the head of Jesus? It read – "the King of the Jews." He was being crucified because he was falsely accused of treason against Caesar at the insistence of the crowds. That was the record of sin that stood against Him with its legal demands.

I wonder what your sign would say? What are the sins that would testify against you? There are lots of sins that characterize our lives. I think it would be helpful for us to just consider a few so that we can feel a bit of the weight of what's happened through Christ.

Theologians will sometimes talk about our sins against God in two categories. There are sins of co-mission, those things we do that we ought not to do. And there are sins of omission – when we don't do what we should do.

What are the things that you do that you know you shouldn't? The things that break the holy Law of God? Things like lying and stealing and gossip and lust and complaining and looking down on others in pride, bursting out in anger, harboring bitter thoughts against others.

Then there are the sins of omission. What are the sins of omission in your life? Failing to be thankful. Failing to pray and seek God in His Word. Failing to make disciples and

share the good news of Jesus with others. Failing to act with justice when we have the power to do so, like with the Good Samaritan parable.

Think about your life this past week – what sins were there? Think about the sins of your past. Have you ever run into someone who knew you earlier in life and you kind of cringe when you think about what kind of person you were and the things you did at that time of life? Or think about what sins you may yet do in your future?

And imagine, then, that this whole list of sins were written down as part of the legal case against you. What would the verdict be?

It would have to be guilty, wouldn't it? We really did sin. And if our sins could talk, they would say, you are guilty, and you deserve to be punished. And if our own conscience could testify – it would agree, wouldn't it? I am guilty. I deserve to be killed for my sins.

But God. By the sheer mercy and grace of God, when Jesus was crucified, he took my record of debt. He took the long list of sins that testified against me, and he nailed it to the cross. The guilt that everyone justly bears was taken up by Jesus voluntarily. He took the entire record of our sins -- past, present, and future --and nailed it to the Cross.

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 no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

That's the good news of salvation! That's the gospel of Jesus Christ! He bore my sins. He took my place. There is no sin in my past that was too much for Him. There is no sin in my future that He has not already paid for. My slate has been wiped clean. I have been forgiven in full when Christ died in my place.

Victory over enemies

Finally, the fifth item in our salvation backpack. Full and complete victory over our enemies.

What do I mean by enemies? Who are your enemies? I'm not talking about people whom you disagree with or who are opposed to you. I have in mind what Paul calls the

‘elemental spirits of the world’ back in verse 8. Here in verse 15, he calls them the rulers and authorities. I admit this isn’t an aspect of salvation that I think a lot about – our victory in Christ over spiritual forces. But listen to what Paul says...

Colossians 2:15

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

This phrase rulers and authorities is a reference to the spiritual, demonic forces of the world. It’s speaking about Satan the accuser and the fallen angels who work in the world to oppose God and His people. This is the enemy – the elemental spirits and rulers and spiritual authorities who accuse and work against you.

How do they work? Hebrews 2:15 tells us they use guilt and shame and the fear of death to threaten you and keep you from walking in Him.

That is the ultimate weapon of the enemy – death. That’s the worst he can do to you.

So when we sin, we hear the whisper of the enemy – you are guilty because you broke God’s law. What’s more, you broke God’s law because you’re a bad person. You should feel shame. In fact, you deserve punishment and exile – everyone ought to turn against you and drive you out. You should be cancelled and never forgiven. You should die.

And when we hear that, we know that there’s an element of truth in it, don’t we? We know that we’re guilty before a holy God. But there’s more to the story.

There’s a song by Shane and Shane from several years ago that I have always found to be a powerful picture of this moment when we are being accused of sin. They sing,

The devil is preaching / The song of the redeemed / That I am cursed and gone astray
I cannot gain salvation / Could the father of lies / Be telling the truth /
Of God to me tonight? / If the penalty of sin is death / Then death is mine
I hear him saying cursed are the ones / Who can’t abide
He’s right / Alleluia he’s right!

Oh the devil’s singing over me / An age old song /

That I am cursed and gone astray

Singing the first verse so conveniently / He's forgotten the refrain:

Jesus saves!

This is the heart of the gospel. That though we were guilty, Christ has forgiven us and removed our guilt from us. And so the great weapon of the enemy has been turned back against Him.

Death was the ultimate weapon, but Christ has defeated death, so Satan and all of the accusers have nothing left. They have been disarmed.

Paul says they have not only been disarmed; they've been put to open shame. Or your translation might say that He's made them an open spectacle. The idea here is that the enemy has been defeated and then paraded around in shame. In the ancient world, if you lost a battle, there wasn't cable news or Twitter or whatever to broadcast that message, so if you won, you'd make the enemy army march through the city as a public spectacle in their defeat.

So you have an army all dressed up in their uniforms but who are totally weaponless - think marching band. All dressed up - no weapons. J/K - I was in a sort of marching band myself, so I can say that.

The point here is that Satan has been utterly embarrassed by Jesus. He has been humiliated. He has been cancelled. And it was the very thing that he had hoped would be his triumph ended up being his undoing.

It's like the story of Daniel and the lion's den. I was in a men's Bible study this week, and we read this story. Do you remember it? The other royal advisors were jealous of Daniel so they had the king make a law that if anyone prayed to someone besides him, he would be thrown into a den of lions. Well, Daniel keeps praying and is thrown into the lion's den, but God shuts the mouths of the lions and he escapes unharmed. But then, those royal advisors who had thought up the idea of a lion's den punishment were themselves thrown into it.

Or you may have heard stories of guys that do fantasy football leagues. And if you win the league, you get a reward, but if you come in last place, then you get punished. Typical punishments are things like getting a tattoo, letting the winner control your social media for a day, or sitting in a waffle house for 24 hours with one fewer hour for each waffle you eat – things like that. One of my favorites was that the loser had to go to a remote area in Montana on Super Bowl Sunday without a phone and only \$100 in cash and just left to try to make his own way back home.

And generally, the group decides together what the terms are going to be before the season starts. And so occasionally, you'll hear stories about a guy who comes up with a crazy punishment only to then be made a public spectacle himself.

That's what has happened to Satan. His big weapon was death – and Jesus died. But death did not have the last word. Jesus defeated death when He rose from the grave. And through our union with Him, we know that death will not have the last word over us as well. Satan has been disarmed and shamed.

Honestly, it was kind of fun thinking about illustrations that resemble what has happened when Christ defeated Satan. I recommend it. You'll see it in movies and TV shows and all kinds of places. The enemy has been disarmed and put to open shame.

So that's the fifth item in our salvation backpack. In Christ, we have numerous blessings.

Final Applications

So how does that help us today? How do these things keep us from being taken captive by empty philosophy?

Let me give you two of what I believe are prominent lies in our culture that these things address. The first is this: Salvation is found by looking inside and expressing yourself.

We see this all over the place in our world today. If you want to be happy, you need to look inside for your authentic self and then express that. You need to live your truth. You will only be happy if you can create an identity for yourself and live that out. And you must celebrate yourself and whoever you believe yourself to be, which is often just whoever other people think you ought to be. These are the kinds of things our young people are being told. It's the message that is just assumed by many people.

But the problem is that salvation and identity and true happiness is not found in looking inside one's self and expressing that. It's found in looking to Jesus – the one who created you and loves you and who alone can transform you and give you new life.

So when you see this lie in our culture, preach the gospel to yourself. Talk about it with your kids. Help that brother or sister in Christ to see the joy that is only found in Jesus. Open your salvation backpack and pull out these truths to combat the lies of our culture.

Secondly, there is a more religious lie which says, you'll never be enough. You will never deserve forgiveness. You'll never be free of guilt and shame. You'll never be at peace, so you must work hard to earn and keep your standing before God and in the world.

This is the lie at the root of the false religions of the world. At the end of the day, every other religion or religious system (including those who wouldn't call themselves religions) – all of these empty philosophies teach that it's all up to you. Have you done enough good? Have you avoided the right sins? Will you be able to keep yourself from failing in the future? And you can't be sure, so you'll never been really free from guilt and shame.

Brothers and sisters, this is a message that is not good news at all. The good news is that Christ has done all that is needed for us to be fully forgiven of all of our sins. He has disarmed the accusations of their power. They no longer have any sway over us. So you can live secure knowing that your salvation is secure.

When you fear that you're not good enough, you can say, "You're right, but Jesus saves!" Jesus helps our unbelief. He has disarmed our enemies, so don't let them scare you with their lies.

Brothers and sisters, remember Jesus is supreme and He is sufficient.
We have been filled in Him, in whom is all the fullness of God bodily.
We have experienced spiritual transformation.
We have been given new life.
We have been fully forgiven.
And we have been given victory over our enemies through Christ. Let's pray...