



***i*Identity** (Colossians 2:8-23)

The letter to the Colossians revolves around the person and purpose of Jesus. Paul reminds Christians of WHO Jesus is and WHOSE we are, and why it matters so much.

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* All Scripture is from CSB (Christian Standard Bible) unless otherwise noted.

BIG TRUTH: IDENTITY is determined by WHOSE we are.

Catch the Context: We left off with Paul encouraging and expecting the Colossians to continue maturing in Christ.

Colossians 2:6-7 ⁶ So then, **just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him,** ⁷ being rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with gratitude.

Those who are living in Jesus, rooted and built up in Him, must not be swayed by the "arguments that sound reasonable" (Col 2:4). There is a spiritual battle for the mind that attempts to dilute the truth.

Colossians 2:8 CSB ⁸ Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elements of the world, **rather than Christ.**

Captive: term referring to *carrying off prisoners and possessions by the victorious army*. Christians must **be careful** and be aware of the false philosophies that are competing with the teachings of Jesus. The Greek word translated as "captive" is ***sylagogon***, very similar to the word 'synagogue'.¹ This is likely an ingenious way to warn the Colossians not to be taken captive through what was being taught by Jews in the synagogue!

The philosophy Paul warns against is **empty & deceitful**. Not all **philosophy** is bad. In fact, philosophy means "love of wisdom", a good thing. But the false philosophy Paul warns about is shallow & seductive, **based on human tradition** handed down from one generation to another. When Jesus was questioned about why His disciples didn't participate in the ceremonial washing "according to the tradition of the elders" (Mk 7:1-5), Jesus countered:

Mark 7:6-13 ⁶ He answered them, "Isaiah prophesied correctly about you **hypocrites**, as it is written: *This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.* ⁷ *They worship me in vain, **teaching as doctrines human commands.*** ⁸ **Abandoning the command of God, you hold on to human tradition.**" ⁹ He also said to them, "You have a fine way of invalidating God's command in order to set up your tradition! ¹⁰ For Moses said: *Honor your father and your mother; and **Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must be put to death.*** ¹¹ But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or mother: Whatever benefit you might have received from me is **corban**' " (that is, an offering devoted to God), ¹² "you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. ¹³ **You nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down.** And you do many other similar things."

This false philosophy was based on human tradition (Col 2:8), but it was also **based on the elements of the world**. Many practiced astrology - looking to the stars, moon, and other planets for answers. Some participated in sacrificial & sexual ceremonies, seeking blessings from false gods, worshipping angels, and other mystical and pagan practices. All of this stuff comes from false philosophy **rather than Christ**. [Some translators interpret **elements of the world** as **elemental spirits** - that were instigated by fallen angels (demons).²]

¹ Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 165-166.

² Douglass Moo writes: "...it is difficult to understand why Paul would abandon the vocabulary he usually uses to describe **spiritual beings** (see 1:16, 20; 2:10, 15) and substitute this unusual, and perhaps unprecedented one." (referring to what some [NET, ESV translate as "elemental spirits") - Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 192.

Sadly, people are quick to believe religious, pagan, or atheistic philosophy **rather than Christ**. Paul reminds his audience why Jesus Christ is true - and all others are counterfeits. In context, the Greek text most literally says...

Colossians 2:9 NET ⁹ For in him [Jesus] all the fullness of deity [God] lives in bodily form,
CSB ⁹ For the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ,

We see **God's hand in all of creation, but we only see God's face in Christ Jesus**. When Jesus stepped onto earth, God's Presence was not best experienced at the Temple nor in the presence of an angel. **The entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ**. Jesus was more than a messenger of God (*angelos* in Greek) & a miracle worker. **Jesus was and is God in skin!**

☀ **MacArthur:** Verse 9 is perhaps the most definitive statement of Christ's deity in the epistles. It is the rock upon which all attempts to disprove Christ's deity are shattered.³

Colossians 2:10 ¹⁰ and you have been filled by him [Jesus], who is the head over every ruler and authority.

Verses 8-9 say that God's fullness dwells in Jesus and you have been **filled by him!** The One who is **the head over every ruler and authority** - every other human, angelic, & demonic authority...if you are a follower of Jesus - **you have been filled by him!**

There is NO ROOM and NO NEED for anything else that claims to fill the HOLE in your SOUL! No person, no possession, no trophy, no title, no 'spirit-guide', no good works - none of that will fill you up. For the follower of Jesus...

BIG TRUTH: IDENTITY is determined by WHOSE we are.

Paul uses some illustrations that we wouldn't use today, but these illustrations were significant those being influenced by Jewish teaching rather than the teachings of Jesus' apostles.

Colossians 2:11 ¹¹ You were also circumcised in him with a circumcision not done with hands, by putting off the body of flesh, in the circumcision of Christ,

Many Jews thought Gentiles had to convert to Judaism before being allowed to follow Jesus, the Jewish Messiah. Gentiles who converted must be **circumcised**, commit to dietary laws, and obey all OT commands. But Paul says that these Gentiles in Colossae **were also circumcised in Him** [Jesus], not by a surgical procedure on the **flesh**, but by a spiritual transformation of the soul. Paul calls this **"circumcision of the heart" in another place Romans 2:28-29** (our old sinful self being cut away and being made into a new creation - 2 Cor 5:17). This heart changed occurred...

Colossians 2:12-13 ¹² when you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, **he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses.**

Baptism is an expectation for the follower of Jesus. The act of physical baptism doesn't wash away your trespasses (sins). This happens when you turn from your sin and trust Jesus' payment. Having died to your sinful past, **he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses**. **Baptism** is a picture of **death, burial, and new life in Jesus!**

He forgave us _____ [fill in] **our trespasses?** This is the THEME of the New Testament!

- ✓ **John** the Baptist saw Jesus and said, "Here is the Lamb of God, **who takes away the sin of the world!**" (Jn1:29)
- ✓ **Jesus** at the last supper, the night before His death, said, "this is **my blood** of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Mat 26:28)
- ✓ **Peter** told Cornelius and his family, "All the prophets testify about Him that **through His Name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.**" (Acts 10:43)

Colossians 2:14-15 ¹⁴ He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has **taken it away by nailing it to the cross.** ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him.

The old song states, **"I had a debt I could not pay, He paid the debt He did not owe."** Jesus has WIPED OUR SIN OUT and we are FREE from sin and its debt! And because of that, Identity is not about WHO you are, healthy or sick, scholar or student, old or young, rich or poor.

BIG TRUTH: IDENTITY is determined by WHOSE we are.

When other **rulers and authorities**, human or demonic, tell you that you are still in debt, you can KNOW that they have been defeated and that YOU have been been FORGIVEN and set FREE!

Paul obliterates the idea that followers of Jesus are still bound to practice Jewish traditions. NOR must they participate in pagan rituals & philosophies.

¹⁶ Therefore, don't let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of what was to come; **the substance is Christ.** ¹⁸ Let no one condemn you by delighting in **ascetic practices** and the **worship of angels**, claiming **access to a visionary realm**. Such people are inflated by empty notions of their unspiritual mind. ¹⁹ **He doesn't hold on to the head** [Jesus], from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and tendons, grows with growth from God. ²⁰ If you died with Christ to the elements of this world, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations: ²¹ "Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch"? ²² All these regulations refer to what is destined to perish by being used up; they are human commands and doctrines. ²³ Although these have a reputation for wisdom by promoting self-made religion, false humility, and severe treatment of the body, they are not of any value in curbing self-indulgence.

One might counter, "*Christians should not worship angels and idolatrous stuff like that, but the Old Testament does say that WE should only eat certain types of foods, worship on the Sabbath, and practice the Jewish ceremonies and festivals.*" To that, Paul, the JEWISH teacher and follower of Jesus has already said... "These are a shadow of what was to come; **the substance is Christ.**" (v17)

Shadows just show that the SUBSTANCE...the real deal, is almost here! The OT laws all pointed to the only ONE who could perfectly fulfill them. We find our Sabbath rest in Jesus. All the sacrifices pointed to the ULTIMATE SACRIFICE, the ONE through whom the **entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily**, who **forgave us for all our sins** and **erased the certificate of debt...by nailing it to the cross.**

What great news that is...for those who have surrendered to Jesus!

BIG TRUTH: IDENTITY is determined by WHOSE we are.

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Have questions and need some help?...real soon...how about now? Please **call** or **text** us soon!

- * Contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Justin** (704-618-6144), **Christy** (673-9764), or another follower of Jesus soon!
- * Or call our **deacons & wives**: Steve & Debbie Bass (673-7952), Freddy & Joyce Howard (973-0047), Jere & Darlene Burnette (673-1888), Boss & Amelia Mulkey (464-6717), Jim & Derita Pinkard (229-834-4307), & Fain & Linda Poppell (464-1282).

discussionquestions

These open-ended questions are designed to help you LIVE what you LEARN with your Family, Friends, or Small Group.

1. Share what most challenged or surprised you from today's teaching.
2. **Read Colossians 2:8.** What are some of the philosophies and traditions in our culture (religious, pagan, or atheistic) that are competing against the teachings of Christ and what can WE do to help young believers counter these false ideas?
3. **Read Colossians 2:9-15.** How might you use this passage to explain that Jesus is more than just a messenger or miracle worker? Discuss some of the most significant claims that Paul makes about Jesus in this text.
4. Look back at today's **BIG TRUTH: IDENTITY is determined by WHOSE we are.** Share some typical characteristics and goals of those who seek to find their identity in WHO they are, rather than in Christ. Then **read Mark 8:34-38.** What warning and encouragement does Jesus give to those who seek to gain the world versus those who seek to find their identity in Jesus?
5. **Read Colossians 2:16-23** with a focus on **2:17.** Take some time to discuss some of the OT laws that Jesus fulfilled, and therefore aren't mandatory for the New Testament believer. Also, point out some of the pagan practices that were condemned in the Scriptures.
6. Based on what we have studied in Colossians, what are characteristics of those who BELONG to Christ? How can you take what you studied today and apply it to your life?
7. Share other prayer needs and lift one another up right now.