

Good morning, Church! My name is Trent Houck, and I am one of the Staff Pastors here at FCBC. It's my joy to bring you to the word this morning. We will be looking at Colossians 2:8-15, but I wanted to begin with one of the New Testament's assumptions: All of the New Testament writers agree that we are in the midst of a spiritual conflict.

Christians *must remain* captive to Christ alone.

Paul writes to the Ephesians:

**11** Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. **12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. **13** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. **14** Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, **15** and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. **16** In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; **17** and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, **18** praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication (Ephesians 6:11-18).

All throughout our series on Colossians, we have been saying that Jesus is *enough*. A few weeks ago, I invited you to begin consistently praying: *Jesus, you are more than enough for me* each day. Far from being a mantra for peacetime, that phrase is for your spiritual protection against the enemy of your soul. It's a correction for your flesh. And, it's an exhortation for your spirit as you stand apart from the culture's ways. Further, it may even protect our church's unity, as we gather around Jesus.

Today, we're going to be examining one of the enemy's key tactics called *captivation*. That is, seizing, snatching, stealing, hijacking, or enticing people into his traps.

But, more importantly, we're going to be examining how the Gospel protects believers from the devil's schemes. So, let's get to work!

In the 2008 film *Taken*, starring Liam Neeson, Brian Mill's teenage daughter Kim Mills, embarks on a trip to Europe from America with some friends. She is instructed to call her dad when she arrives so that he can be assured of her safety. After failing to do this, Brian calls Kim, only to find her watching as her friend is abducted by human traffickers in their hotel room.

She panics, watching from the bathroom window.

Brian slowly and carefully walks her through another set of instructions so that he can gather as much information as he can about the criminals. Over the phone, he says calmly, "They will take you, and when they do, shout out as much information about them as you can. Their hair color. Eye color. Scars. Anything." The viewer watches Brian, as a father, hearing his daughter scream while being taken into the hands of predators. It's horrific. I don't recommend it.

Brian Mill's packs his bags and sets out on a thrilling, heart-pumping, two hour journey to recapture his daughter from danger.

What's the point of the story?

Don't let yourself be overtaken by predators! See to it that no one takes you captive. Pay attention!

Kim fails to do this.

Kim believed that she was safe. That those kinds of things happen only to other people until the moment is upon her.

In the same way Epaphras rushes to Paul to find help in his time of need. The Colossians were being captivated by false teachers. What should he do?

Are we as a Church spiritually alert and awake, or are we floating down the Boise River of our spiritual lives, without a care in the world?

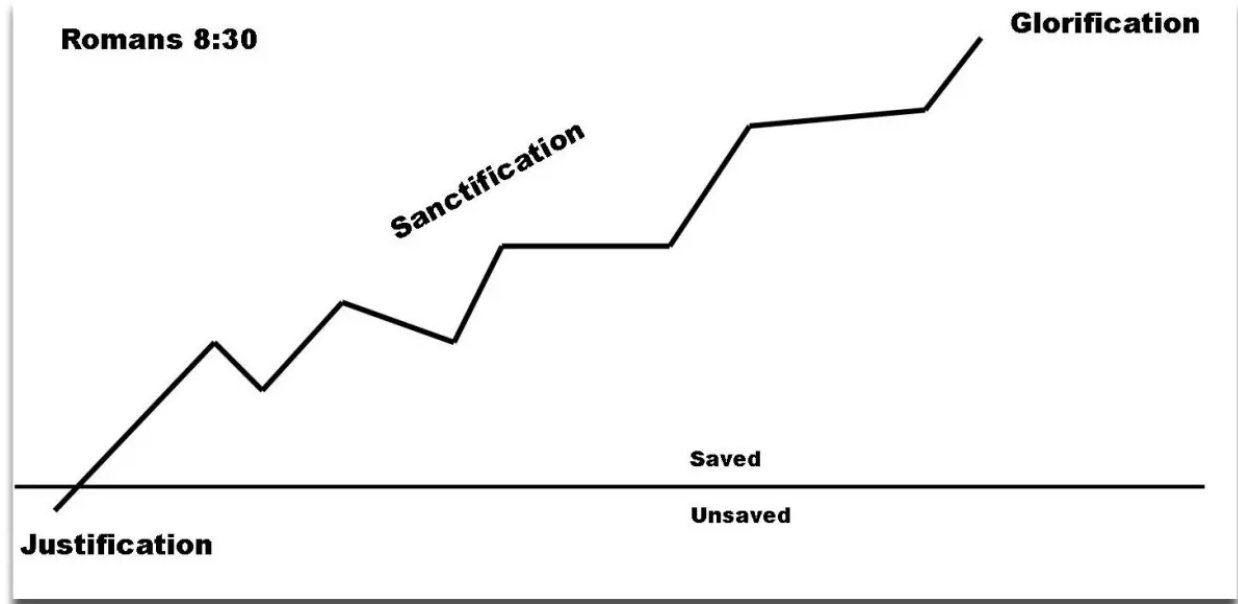
Where are you this morning?

Are you aware of your spiritual surroundings?

There are basically two kinds of Christians here this morning:

1. Those who are growing and experiencing rich, joyful, and enduring fellowship with the living God. Those who are safe in Christ.
2. Those who are languishing and wilting in unbelief, falling into patterns of sin, and becoming captives to harmful snares.

Theologians throughout the centuries have described the process of sanctification, or growth in godliness, in this way:



While the overall trajectory of the Christian life is upward toward glorification and growth, there are rabbit trails and stuck points where we get lost. One of the ways that this can happen is by allowing ourselves to be captivated by false ideas of who Christ is. This can happen even in, and maybe even especially in, the local church.

So, to reset the stage a bit for Colossians, we are two chapters into this glorious letter. Epaphras, one of Paul's Gospel-workers, traveled to Paul, who was in a Roman Prison and reported that there were predators at Colossae that were placing barriers in front of the Colossians. There were people being taken captive, and seduced into snares.

Paul's central theme in the letter is the sufficiency of Christ. Jesus is enough. And, we continue to come back to this question: Enough for what?

Last week, we found that Jesus is enough *for the entirety of the Christian life*.

Paul writes,

**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 (Colossians 2:6-7).

Paul says, "There is only one way to stay spiritually safe: Stay fixed on Jesus. Pay attention to Jesus. Don't swerve from Jesus."

At this point, the Church at Colossae was ten years into their relationship with Christ, and they were being tempted, tested, and tried by the enemy of their

souls. This took the form, not mainly of persecution, but the seductive force of false teaching.

So then, all of Paul's praying (Col. 1:3-14), theologizing (Colossians 1:15-20), explaining (Colossians 1:21-25), animating (Colossians 1:24-29), and exhorting (2:1-7) are the martial arts and defense against false teaching. His purpose is to move the Colossians out of danger into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, who alone is safe and can save.

So, in the next three sections of Colossians, Paul aims to show that Christ is enough by issuing three warnings:

- "See to it that no one takes you captive" (2:8)
- "Let no one pass judgment on you..." (2:16)
- "Don't submit to regulations" on the basis of human tradition (2:20)

Paul reveals that there is nothing more compelling and seductive to humans than: false teaching, the opinion and praise of other men, and bodily regulations that provide proof of salvation. These are all barriers to the Christian's growth and can get them on side trails and dead ends.

In this particular section Paul warns against captivating philosophies by giving one negative command, providing at least five reasons for this command, and reminding the Colossians of the Gospel.

The Gospel, we find, is the antidote to spiritual kidnapping.

Before we begin unpacking our text, we need to pause and reflect. Are we facing the same danger of *spiritual captivity* today? I would argue that we are.

Consider our appetite for information, for teaching: Who among us is *not* listening to a constant stream of data through podcasts, articles, books, social media, blogs and the like? We are being exposed to more teachers, more philosophies, and opinions than previous generations could ever imagine. Jean Twenge cites that the average pre-covid, High School Senior in 2017 spent at least 6 hours a day on social media.

Could it be that we are even more *susceptible* to the diseases of false information, false doctrine, and false teaching precisely *because* we are so inundated with sheer volume of it?

Paul could likely have identified the false teachers by name. He could have detailed, even more acutely, what exactly they were teaching and why it was wrong. There was a definiteness and a concreteness to his world. He probably worked with Epaphras to be specific. He also worked with Timothy as a co-author

(1:1). Paul was an expert in Judaism, and he was fluent in Greco-Roman pantheistic philosophy and cult religions of his day. He knew his world.

So, no matter where the threat came from, Paul could work through it.

But, we live in a new kind of world.

In our culture of *expressive individualism*, we are all experts, especially on ourselves. We appoint our own experts. We curate our own lists of gurus and teachers, with nearly endless options, if one should fail. And, we do all of this privately, with no sense of accountability or visibility.

And sometimes we wonder why we're at a spiritual stuck point in our sanctification.

While *more* information is not inherently problematic, the human desire for *infinite knowledge and infinite autonomy with that knowledge* stems all the way back to the garden. The serpent's lie in the garden was this: "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, *knowing* good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5).

The very first lie that led to the Fall and the captivity of humanity was an invitation to the secret passageway of *more, even infinite*, knowledge. "You can know what God knows," says Satan. "I have a faster way to become like God. It's two, even three times, faster than what you're used to."

This is dangerous for humanity.

So, God said, "Don't take that road!" This is because only God can handle infinite information and knowledge.

Ever since that moment in the garden, enemies of God have been making similar claims, dressed up in new clothes for each succeeding generation. While the flowers of sin may look different, the seeds of sin remain the same.

So, here is the main *personal* question for us to ask: What captivates the attention of your heart? If you are *not* totally satisfied with the person and work of Jesus Christ, you *will* go into a season of being stuck.

Mature pastors, theologians, and church members know that they are not immune to this. For example, one of the ghosts in C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*, who should be most familiar with the things of God is afforded the opportunity to head to heaven. However, he remarks, "Bless my soul, I'd nearly forgotten. Of course I can't come with you [to heaven]. I have to be back next Friday to read a paper. We have a little Theological Society down there [that is, in Hell]."

Lewis' haunts us with the hell-bent theologian, who will not enter into true knowledge *of* God for fear that he would have to forsake knowledge *about* God.

He needed *his* theology, not Jesus alone. What captivates the attention of your heart?

Here is our main point:

Christians *must remain* captive to Christ alone.  
Not ideas about Christ. Not philosophies concerning Christ. Not religious ideals related to Christ. Not with religious culture.  
But to Christ himself. He alone is the substance. And there is no replacement.

Paul will unpack this main point in the following four ways and we will try to follow him closely:

1. **(Command) The Call to Be Captive to Christ *Alone* (Colossians 2:8)**
2. **(Reasons) The Christian's Causes to Be Captive To Christ (Colossians 2:9-12)**
3. **(Explains) The Christian's Canceled Debts at the Cross (Colossians 2:13-14)**
4. **(Reminds) The Christian's Conquering King (Colossians 2:15)**

Christians *must remain* captive to Christ alone.

*Heavenly Father*, we again come to you this morning to seek your face. You alone are our highest good. You are worthy of all our praise, adoration, study, and desires. We pray this morning that you would reveal yourself through your Word.

*Jesus*, thank you for being enough. Thank you for your perfect life, your atoning death, and for the resurrection that assures us and comforts us. Cause us to walk more deeply rooted in you as a result of being together this morning.

*Holy Spirit*, we pray that you would empower the preaching of your Word. That you would train us for godliness. Expose sin in our hearts. Show us how we are inclined to pursue enticing substitutes, rather than being fully satisfied with the Person and Work of Jesus. We pray that you would provide a real experience right here and right now of exactly what this text is talking about. We pray that you would do this for our good and for your glory, and we pray it in Christ's name, amen.

**First, Paul issues a command that we be captive to Christ *Alone*.** He writes,

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.

Paul says, "Watch out! Pay attention! See to it! Look both ways!" This is the negative command: "Don't let anyone take you captive." It's important to notice that this command is not issued at the level of moral behavior, ethical actions, or instructions (he will get to that in chapter 3). Rather, Paul wants the Colossians to *think*. There's a difference.

He's not saying, "Don't *do* that!" but rather, "Don't *think* that way!"

Paul is addressing a command to the Colossians' belief system, to the way that they construct their understanding of everything. Really, this is a command addressed to what psychologists call "metacognition." The way you think about the way you think. "See to it", is saying, "Pay attention to the way you think about the world."

While this command is negative, "Don't let anyone take you captive" the double negative at the end of the verse opens up the possibility of us stating it positively:

Don't be captive to anything, [that is] not according to Christ.

While in 2 Corinthians 10:5, he puts it positively,

"We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ..." (2 Corinthians 10:5)

So, what are the weapons of these predators that Paul warns us about?

There are two: Philosophy and empty deceit. 'Philosophy' and 'empty deceit' are both *intellectual* exercises. 'Philosophy' is literally, the 'love of wisdom.' "Empty deceit" is something that appears to be compelling, but it ends up being a road to nowhere. They are cheap tricks.

So, the key question here is this: What do you allow to captivate you at the level of the imagination? Some of us are held *captive* by cat videos, our email inboxes, our jobs, careers, vacations, or kids etc. If you want to know what you're captivated by, just ask someone close to you, they see where your eyes go. They see what causes your emotions to spike or your heart to race.

Human beings can be *captivated* at the level of the imagination, intellect, and reason. And, this is a beautiful human capacity. It's one of the ways that we are sanctified: Christians are to be captured by beautiful, glorious and penetrating

thoughts of God. However, the pervasiveness of sin is such that it affects our reason and makes us susceptible to counterfeit gods.

And so, the mind can be compelled to fall back into old, empty ways.

So, then, Paul gives the Colossians two pieces of evidence to show why this philosophy is inferior.

First, he says that this philosophy comes from 'human tradition', or that it literally is 'handed down/given from men.' Second, he says that it proceeds from the 'elemental spirits' of the world. To define these two things within the context of the Colossian Church, we need to see the Colossians as Paul sees them.

The Colossians were *not* atheists, materialists, or individualists when they came to Christ. Prior to knowing Jesus, they were subject to the Greco-Roman pantheon of gods, rules of community life, and political views, etc. They were likely deeply superstitious, animistic, and spiritual. They were also probably very smart, philosophical and reflective. They were steeped in religious practices handed down by men, and believed that they were subject to the elemental spirits, that is, the spiritual forces of nature, or spiritual beings, that set the world in motion.

Why would the Colossians be tempted to go back there?

There are probably at least two reasons: first, these things made *intellectual* sense to them. Human tradition is a powerful persuader. It fit in their previous worldview.

**To illustrate:** you find when you get married that your spouse inherited a whole host of human traditions that come into conflict with your own traditions. This shows up in all kinds of ways from family vacations, to Christmas traditions, to how you organize your sock drawer. Why do you do things that way? It's just how we did it in my house. It's intuitive.

Second, the Colossians were tempted to regress because it made *spiritual* sense to them. They were tempted to practice their Christianity in line with their pantheistic upbringing.

**To illustrate:** we grew up in a materialistic, scientific world that has emancipated itself from the need of God. So, what do you think is our default mode when we're under pressure? We tend to value what's measurable and manageable over the Spirit.

You see, the Colossians are being tempted in these ways because they are being called to follow Christ *alone*. When they come in contact with situations that seem to require more than Christ, they panic, and are susceptible to being taken captive.

They have abandoned a whole series of practices, ways of life, traditions, and experiences that *feel* so normal. So, when these false teachers come along and



tell them, "It's okay, add something to Christ!" This would have come across like their native, heart language.

But, in the Gospel, Christians are given a *new* heart.

Paul wrote earlier: "God has *delivered* us from the domain of darkness [this is every spiritual culture that does not exalt Christ is King, including our own] and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14). In other words, Colossians, you no longer belong to human traditions or elemental spirits of the world, the domain of darkness. You belong to Christ *alone*.

And, Christ *alone* is sufficient. Paul writes, "He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation...For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things..." (Colossians 1:19-20). In other words, all attempts to order the universe by human tradition, or the spirits of the age are found wanting precisely because Jesus is the central figure to all things. Without Christ at the center, nothing makes sense in Christianity.

Don't let *anyone* take you captive.

Be captive to Christ alone.

So, what are the reasons that a Christian ought to stay captivated by Christ?

That leads us to our next point:

## **Second, Paul gives at least five causes or reasons to remain captive to Christ.**

This part of the sermon *could* get very technical with questions about baptism, the nature of salvation, faith, and circumcision. But, my hope for you as we read this section is that you will ask this question:

How could I be captivated by anything or anyone other than Jesus? He has given me everything that I could ever want or need in Himself!

If you are not a believer in Jesus, this could be a moment where God performs the very action he describes in this passage. We are praying that he does.

So, let your soul count the reasons for joy. Look at what God has done for you.

**9** For in him[Christ] 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.

The most important phrases that I want you to take from this section are these words: "In Him." Or, "in Christ" Or, "With Christ." These phrases are used around 165 times in Paul's letters.

Here, Paul gives us the logic of the Gospel. He says, what keeps you from being captivated by false teachers?

1. The Fullness of God dwells in Christ (Col. 2:9).
2. You have been filled or completed in Christ (Col. 2:10)
3. You were spiritually circumcised, or made alive in Christ (2:11).
4. You were buried with Christ by baptism (2:12).
5. You were raised with Christ through his resurrection (2:12).

So, with these five reasons, or causes Paul renders the empty deceit or philosophy completely powerless by comparison. Each of them is a source of joy for the Christian.

Notice though, what saves or sanctifies the Colossians is *not* a set of practical actions (i.e. do this). But a set of objective, concrete, *past actions* that were accomplished by God.

Paul says,

You have been filled in Christ.  
You were circumcised in Christ.  
You were buried with Christ.  
You were raised with Christ.

So that means, the most important, transformative, and spiritually significant moments in the Christian life are those that took place through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's not about what we *do*, it's about what Christ has *done*.

See, if you want to encourage a moralist, you give them a set of to-dos by which they can save themselves. You give them a problem set and you show them the way to solve each one.

If you want to encourage a Christian, however, you remind her of what Christ has already accomplished on her behalf. That the Christian's main problem, sin, has been resolved at the Cross of Christ.

So, let's unpack why each of these five causes are so encouraging.

**First, "In Christ" all the fullness of deity dwells bodily.** The aim of this statement is to drive the Colossians away from two errors.

1. **Jesus was partially God.** The belief that you can find God outside of Christ is lethal. And, it will kill your joy. Knowing that you can only find God in Christ sends you soaring.
2. **Jesus was immaterial.** The belief that Jesus was only a soul or a spirit makes him unable to accomplish the forgiveness of sins. So, Paul straightens these false teachers out.

"No," Paul says, "All the fullness of deity, or anything you want to know about God can be found in Christ, the incarnate Son of God."

**Application:**

First, You don't need to look further than Jesus to find God.

Second, the material universe, including our bodies, were designed and created as "very good." God incarnate, the fullness of God, comes to find us in the incarnate Jesus. This is good news!

**Second, You have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority.**

This too, protects the Colossians from at least two errors.

1. **Salvation is partial.** No, Paul says, you were filled. There are no additional steps necessary to open yourself up to God. God has filled you in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. For all of us who find Christianity lacking at times, we need to be reminded that Jesus didn't skimp on us. He poured himself out completely on the cross.
2. **Jesus' authority is derived.** No, Paul says, Jesus is the head of every and all authority. So, there is no higher authority or power by which you can be filled than the Person of Jesus Christ.

**Third, You were made spiritually sensitive, or alive, by the death of Christ.**

God accomplished a circumcision of the heart, that is a spiritual one, not by hands, through the Cross of Christ. That is to say, you were given a new heart, filled with new affections, and given a new spiritual vitality at the Cross. This protects the Christian from the errors that:

1. **You need additional spiritual work to be saved.** Nope! Christ has done it all. You can't make yourself more sensitive than God has already made you to himself.

- 2. Your old self rules you.** Nope! You are a new Creation in Christ Jesus. Even though we face Romans 7 kinds of moments with our flesh and sin, we know that Christ put the flesh to death at the Cross, we live alive to God.

**Fourth, You were buried with Christ in Baptism.** So, Jesus, having been laid in the tomb, was buried. Likewise, when the Christian undergoes baptism, they are visibly identifying with Christ's death and burial. The Christian doesn't fear death because he or she has already died. So, no practices of death-avoidance, whether that's aging creams, or plastic surgery, or diets will ever truly satisfy.

If you are in Christ, God sees Christ's burial as your own burial. You went through a spiritual graveside service.

**Baptism Service:** We do baptisms, which signify this transformation at least two times each year. If you have an interest in publicly declaring your allegiance to Jesus Christ, please talk to me after this service or sign up online!



**Fifth, You were also raised with Christ in his resurrection.** When Jesus was raised, you were also raised with him. This protects the Colossian Christians from falling into the error that:

- 1. Christ wasn't really raised.** The empty tomb, the public appearances, the historically reliable proof all have massive implications for the Christian.
- 2. Christ's resurrection doesn't matter.** No way, when Christ was raised, Christians were raised with him. So, when he beat death, we beat death.

Now, this is not a series of five steps to become a Christian. Rather, when a Christian becomes a Christian all five of these things become real, clear, and apparent. They all happen simultaneously, seamlessly. And, God does it all from first to last, through an instrument called *faith*.

So, we have to come back to verse 12:

having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him *through faith* in the powerful working of God...

God does all this when a person believes.

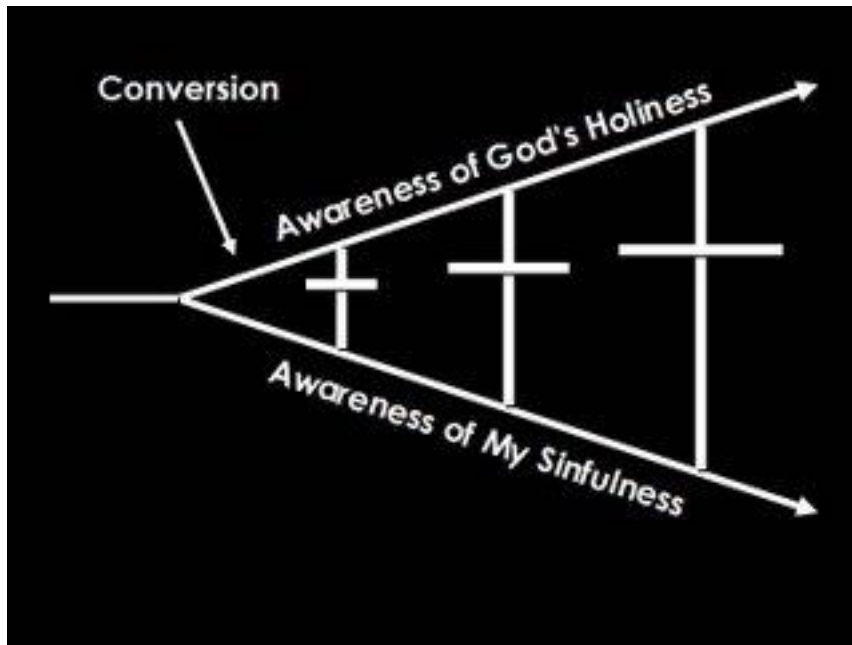
The way to stay safe from deceptive philosophies and empty myths is by rehearsing the Gospel, which saves sinners *by faith*. Staying safe in Christ is to be fully saturated in the blood-bought goodness of salvation by grace through faith.

That leads us to our third point:

**Third, if that's not enough, God went ahead and canceled your debts past, present, and future.** Christianity is not a get-well soon plan. It's not a series of steps or moral accomplishments. No, Christianity is a declaration that our debts have been canceled. Look with me at verse 13:

**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.

This text is astounding. I want to focus on the middle of verse 13: "Having forgiven us *all* our trespasses." That is, forgiveness without reference to time. This means that the total record of debt that you accrued, past, present, and future is nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ.



So then, three things should grow as we age: First, our awareness of God's moral perfection and holiness. Our salvation cost the death of his Son. Second, our sense of our own personal sinfulness. Our sin is *still* our greatest problem. Third, a growing awareness that the Cross of Jesus Christ bridges the gap from now to eternity.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says,

**21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

So, how does this relate to our previous two points? How does this keep us from the seduction and captivity of false doctrine? These questions lead us to our final point. With this, we will bring this sermon to a close.

**Finally, we remain captive to Christ because through the Cross Jesus became our Conquering King.** Paul writes,

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

The image behind this text is that of the Roman Procession. One Author writes,



"The triumphal procession was a lavish parade conducted in Rome to celebrate great victories in significant military campaigns... They were ostentatious celebrations, filled with valiant soldiers, the spoils of war, and the most theatrical pomp and circumstances Rome could muster. Moreover, the triumphal procession demonstrated Rome's prowess as the victor not only by parading the spoils of war, but also by leading in triumph the most important leaders and intimidating warriors of the enemy, now presented as conquered slaves. The highest honor any Roman Caesar or general could receive would be to lead one of these parades. Conversely, to be led as a prisoner in such a triumphal procession signaled one's utter defeat. . .



[T]he role of those led in triumph was to reveal the glory of the one who had conquered them, ultimately through their public execution and death. . . . At the end of the parade, the Romans publicly slaughtered as a sacrifice to their god(s) those prisoners who had been led in procession (or at least a representative sample thereof, selling the rest into slavery). Though a gruesome thought to us, what better way to magnify one's victory, while at the same time offering a sacrifice of gratitude to the

gods, than to kill publicly the leaders and the most valiant of the vanquished warriors as the final act of triumph over them?

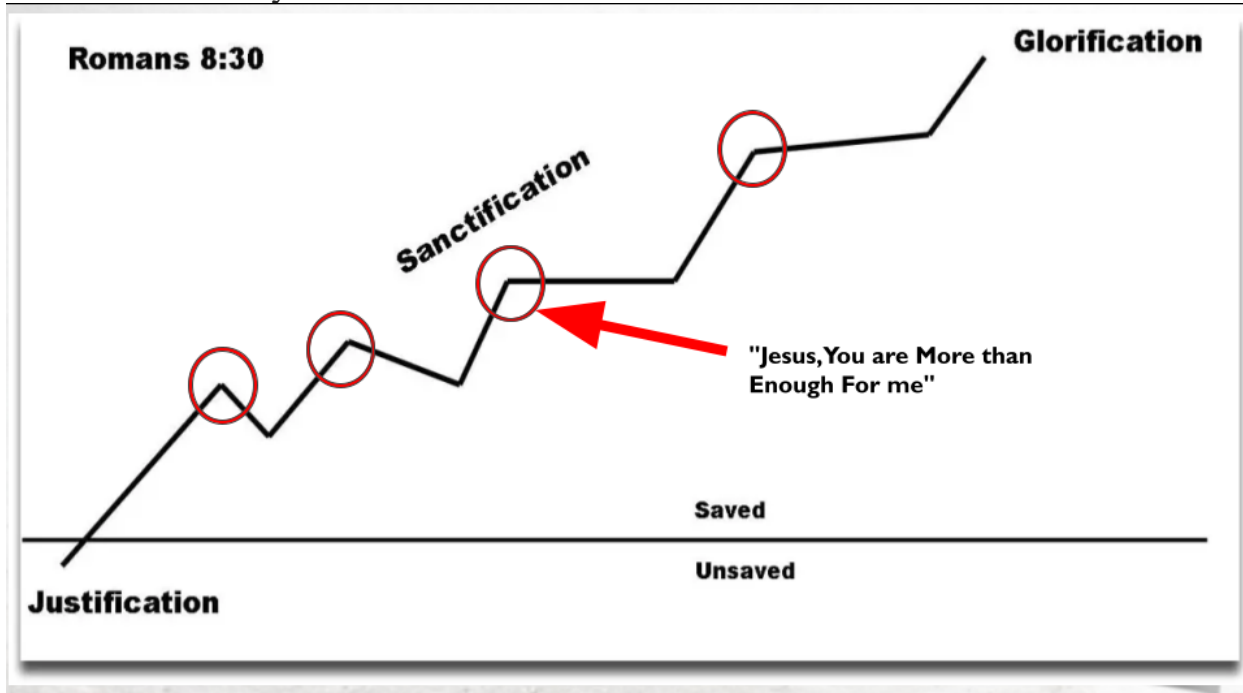
To make this more contemporary, the Golden State Warriors had a parade in their own city to celebrate their 2022 championship against the Celtics.

When did God accomplish this? When were the authorities and rulers disarmed, and when did the triumphal procession happen? Doug Moo writes,

"...Paul insists that God, by sending Christ to the cross as the final and definitive means to take care of the sin problem, has removed any power that these evil spirits might have over us. This victory, celebrated and displayed in the resurrection and ascension of Christ, is what believers need to grasp as their own. Christ's authority over the rulers and authorities (v. 10) has been decisively manifested; and "in him" believers share that authority."

So, the Colossians are called and commanded not to be captivated because their captors were *already* conquered. The fall prey to them was to reassign them power that had already been taken away.

Christian, don't go backward! Don't get taken captive! Remain captive to Christ. He alone is worthy.



In case you're wondering, at the end of the 2008 Film *Taken*, Liam Neeson's character, after defeating the enemies, returns his daughter home to the U.S. safe and sound. It is a triumphant and glorious reunion.



This is the hope of the Christian life: what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. It is also the hope of Christian Missions. It is the message that we preach so that nations might rejoice, with the same joy that we possess. We're going to end our message with a brief update and time of prayer for our Missions Team heading to Mongolia.