

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Solemnly the Spirit has warned us to beware of the beguiling and subversive influences of men. Using philosophy and vain deceit, men can lure us from the safety zone, causing us to become vulnerable to the devices of the devil. "And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words . . . Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col 2:4,8). The need for being rooted and grounded had caused Paul to have a “great conflict” for the Colossians, Laodiceans, and all who

had not seen his face – which includes us (2:1). He was spiritually aware and cognizant of the absolute essentiality of the Lord Jesus Christ in every aspect of spiritual life.

In his letter to the Colossians Paul has already underscored the indispensability of the Lord Jesus. Consider some of his expressions previous to our text.

1. Paul was an Apostle “OF JESUS CHRIST” (1:1).
2. Saints and faithful brethren are “IN CHRIST” (1:2).
3. In salvation, God is primarily “the Father OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST” (1:3).
4. Our faith is “IN CHRIST JESUS” (1:4).
5. Faithful ministers are ministers “OF CHRIST” (1:5).
6. It pleased the Father that “all fulness” should well “IN HIM” (1:19).
7. The “afflictions” in which believers participate are “THE AFFLICTIONS OF CHRIST” (1:24).

8. The “hope of glory” is CHRIST “in” us (1:27).
9. The objective is to “present every man perfect IN CHRIST JESUS” (1:28).
10. Our faith is to be “steadfast” “IN CHRIST” (2:5).
11. We have received “CHRIST JESUS THE LORD” (2:6a).
12. We walk “IN HIM” (2:6b).
13. We are “rooted and built up IN HIM” (2:7a).
14. Anything that is not “AFTER CHRIST” will make “spoil” of us, causing us to be taken captive by mere men (2:8).

The words “Jesus” and “Christ” occur 1,208 times from Matthew through Revelation. Add to that terms “the Son,” “Son of God,” and the various appellations by which He is identified, and you get the clear indication that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Foundation and Cornerstone of the salvation of God and all “sound doctrine.” Jesus is the summation of everything God has to say to men, and what He has accomplished is the basis for any blessed identity with the God of heaven. His current presence at the right hand of God is what His sustaining the church. It is His mediation that is bringing the benefits of the New Covenant to its constituents. Whatever God gives to us comes through Christ. He is the One

who is bringing the sons to glory (Heb 2:10). He is the Chief Shepherd of the people, leading, enabling, and blessing them.

There is not enough being made of Jesus these days, even though the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Him (Col 1:19; 2:9). There is no essential attribute of God that is not found in Jesus, and He is “Lord of all.”

In things that pertain to life and godliness, every program that did not originate with Him is pointless and vain. No resource required to make it from earth to glory can be found outside of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

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Chapter 2

THE NEED FOR THIS EMPHASIS

Although it may appear as though there is no need to elaborate upon the centrality of Jesus Christ and His complete adequacy, this is not at all the case. A proper perception of the Lord Jesus Christ is most difficult to obtain, and even more demanding to maintain. This is particularly true when society is in a state of deterioration, and the religious environment is fundamentally corrupt. In order for such a perception to be enjoyed initially, and subsequently sustained, the following are required.

1. The preaching of the Gospel (1 Cor 15:1-3).
2. The expounding of the Gospel (Rom 15:29).
3. The regular ingestion of the Word of God (Lk 4:4).
4. The influence of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13; Rom 8:11,13; 15:13; Gal 5:5; Eph 3:16; 1 Pet 1:22).
5. The prayers of the saints (Eph 6:18; Eph 1:18-20; 3:15-20; Col 1:9-11).
6. The hearty efforts of the saints themselves (2 Cor 7:1; Phil 2:12; 1 Tim 4:16; 6:12).

These things are required because we are not living in a moral vacuum. Adversarial and competitive influences are regularly brought to bear upon our intellect, emotion, and will.

1. We are living in a condemned and passing world (1 John 2:15-17).
2. We have this treasure in earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:7).
3. We are hounded by a fierce and cunning adversary (1 Pet 5:8).
4. There is a contrary law resident in our members (Rom 7:23).
5. There remains a sense in which we are still “absent from the Lord” (2 Cor 5:6).

THE CURSE OF THE CASUAL

Wherever a casual spirit is found among professing believers, there is no grasp of these things. Life is thus lived with no compelling sense of a need for Jesus. Those in the grip of such delusion are actually in a state of spiritual decline. If they had a grasp of the truth, they are losing it. Satan is gaining more and more access to them. Their spiritual vision and strength are fading, and will continue to do so until their backward stance is arrested.

There are no exceptions to this rule. We are in a condemned world, and a body that cannot enter the kingdom of God. We have a competing law within our own persons, and an adversary attacking us from without. It simply is not possible to comprehend

this situation and remain in a nonchalant posture.

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casualness. The failure to see this is the cause of all religious compromise and moral and spiritual decline. This is why the following conditions exist in the American church. 1. The dominance of a professional clergy, and a consequent stress on education. 2 An emphasis on entertainment and events with popular appeal. 3. Sermonic shallowness and brevity, which tend to be joined together. 4. Infrequency of general assemblies. 5. An inordinate stress on appearance. 6. A remarkable level of Scriptural illiteracy throughout the church. I am going to wax bold and affirm, these conditions are the direct result of pushing Jesus into the background. There is nothing about Jesus, what He has accomplished, or what He is doing, that contributes to, or encourages, such things. The Gospel of Christ does not promote them in any degree or to any extent. While the notion that Jesus Christ is not adequate is not actually affirmed among most believers, this impression is being produced. If men do not preach a message that affirms everything hinges upon Christ, men will tend to think this is not the case. If “the Lord’s Christ” is not the heart and core of both preaching and teaching, we should not be surprised if He is not the heart and core of living. This is precisely why Paul now strikes down the idea that Jesus is in any sense peripheral in matters pertaining to life and godliness. He is not an adjunct to sound doctrine, but is the heart and soul of it. That is what is intended by the expression, “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10). One version reads, “For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus” (NLT).

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Chapter 4

HOW ADEQUATE IS JESUS?

How adequate is Jesus Christ? Is everything related to our salvation really found in Him, and in Him alone?

Jesus spoke directly of the indispensability of Himself, as well as his solitary uniqueness.

1. THE WAY, THE Truth, and THE Life. “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

2. THE TRUE VINE. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman” (John 15:1).

3. THE DOOR. “I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9).

4. THE GOOD SHEPHERD. “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

5. THE BREAD OF LIFE. “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

6. THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. “I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

7. THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE. “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25).

Jesus does not share these roles with anyone or anything else. His position in all of them is exclusive. That is why it was declared, and is written, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). That is “salvation” in all of its fulness. It is the salvation of which we heard when the Gospel came to us (Eph 1:13). It is the salvation we are currently working out with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). It is the salvation that is “ready to be revealed” in the day of the Lord (1 Pet 1:5).

In order for a professing Christian to fail to grow, remaining in spiritual infancy, or to draw back in retrogression, the following must take place. This is so because everything about salvation is

calculated to produce maturity and an increasingly strong grasp and perception of the truth of God.

1. God's great salvation must be neglected (Heb 2:3).
2. The Spirit must be quenched (1 Thess 5:19).
3. The Spirit must be grieved (Eph 4:30).
4. The Spirit must be resisted (Acts 7:51).
5. People must forget they were purged from their old sins (2 Pet 1:9).
6. The Word of God must be neglected (Luke 4:4).
7. The Son of God must be trodden under foot (Heb 10:29a).
8. The blood of the covenant must be accounted an unholy thing (Heb 10:29b).
9. An evil heart of unbelief must enter unto the person (Heb 3:12).
10. The person must cease to look unto Jesus, the Author and the

Finisher of our faith (Heb 12:2).

11. A place must have been made for the devil (Eph 4:27).

12. Satan was not resisted by steadfastness on the faith (1 Pet 5:9).

13. The beginning of confidence was not held steadfastly (Heb 3:14).

14. Salvation was not worked out with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).

15. The individual did not abide in Christ (John 15:4,7).

16. Backsliders have ceased to take up their cross daily and follow Christ Jesus (Lk 9:23).

Backsliding is not possible if these things do not take place – and where they do take place, drawing back is inevitable. God will not allow any person to grow spiritually or remain stable who relegates Christ to the outskirts of life. Further, nothing in the Gospel encourages such a posture. A good conscience will not allow a person to consider Christ secondary. A pure heart is repulsed by such an attitude. The Holy Spirit will strive against such a notion. The word of Christ will not dwell richly in the person who does not keep Jesus in the foreground of thought and purpose.

No person can allow the sophistry of contemporary religion to erode the persuasion that Jesus is, in fact, “highly exalted,” and has been given “a name which is above every name” (Phil 2:9).

Wherever these pivotal realities have become obscure, competing influences have gained the upper hand. All profession of allegiance to Christ is thus negated, and He has “become of no effect” (Gal 5:4).

A REASON FOR THIS SECTION

This is one of strong reasons why the Lord Jesus must be properly expounded. No room must be left for the entrance of distracting thoughts that move a person to live with Christ in the background. God has put Him into the foreground, setting Him “forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood” (Rom 3:25). A “propitiation” is a merciful covering – like the “mercy seat” over the ark of the covenant. That covering, however, is realized through Divinely appointed means – “through faith in His blood.” Where Christ is not central, there can be no faith “in His blood.” And, where such a faith does not exist, Jesus is not a merciful covering! That does have some alarming ramifications!

Through the Holy Spirit, Paul will now expound the Person and accomplishments of Christ – two indispensable perceptions relating to salvation. His words will confirm that it is totally unreasonable for Jesus to occupy a secondary position in any facet of salvation, any aspect of spiritual life, or any view of the redemption that is in Him alone.

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Chapter 5

INTRODUCTION TO THE FULNESS OF THE GODHEAD BEING IN JESUS BODILY

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” (Col 2:9)

Throughout church history, a variety of differing and competing views have been perpetrated and adopted in Christendom concerning Jesus Christ. Some have held that Jesus is not Divine – that His essential Person was created, and hence had a beginning. Others hold that the Godhead, or Deity, is comprised of a single personality, performing three different functions – each of which is related to time. The name of that single personality, according to

this view, is “Jesus.” There are a number of nuances in these, and other such theological opinions.

The presence of the text before us confirms that men are not at liberty to entertain a wrong view of Jesus Christ. Men can have differing views of meats and days, but they cannot have differing views of Christ Jesus. Even in the variant views that are allowed, maturity will bring believers to see the matter as God sees it – to have “one mind and one mouth” (Rom 15:6), or “the same mind and the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10). Salvation provides for this kind of unanimity, where there are “no divisions” (1 Cor 1:10). Whether or not men avail themselves of the resources that lead to this condition is another matter.

God has provided a “record” of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). That record furnishes remarkable details concerning His Person, accomplishments, present activity, and what He will do in the future. The Epistles are an exposition of that Gospel, in which contradicting views are dashed to the ground with kingdom violence. Distorted views of Christ are addressed solemnly and certainly by both Jesus and the apostles.

We simply cannot be wrong about the Son of God! That is precisely why this extended exposition has been written. This is the real Jesus, not “another Jesus” concocted within the minds of finite men (2 Cor 11:4). When there is a fundamental misrepresentation of Jesus it is not treated lightly. Those embracing and teaching such views are not perceived as simply being mistaken. Rather, they are guilty of proclaiming “another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:4).

WHAT WILL BE ESTABLISHED

This passage will establish that, in matters pertaining to life and godliness, God has nothing to offer men that is not in Christ Jesus. God has invested everything in His Son, and nothing He gives can be obtained independently of Him. The case Paul makes will be unusually strong because of what is at stake. He will face us with eternal issues.

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unequal to comprehending its meaning. This is written to all of the brethren, young and old, and is for our edification. It has to do with being rooted and grounded, and steadfast in the faith. ALL THE FULNESS “. . . all the fulness of the Godhead . . .” Other versions read, “the fulness of Deity” (NASB), “the fulness of the Deity” (NIV), “the whole fulness of Deity” (NRSV), “the wealth of God’s Being” (BBE), “Deity in all of its fulness” (NJB), “the fulness of God” (NLT). The word “fulness” denotes completeness – not mere abundance. That is, the “fulness” of something means it is all of it. This is now the second time Paul has referred to the fulness resident in Christ Jesus. He first affirmed, “it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell” (Col 1:19). Not only does this “fulness” please God, it is in strict accord with His eternal purpose. This is to be understood within the context of the previous verse – although its meaning is not limited to that context. Believers stood in danger of being spoiled, or taken captive, by philosophy, vain deceit, and the traditions of men. All of those things are said to be “not of Christ.” That is, not a solitary one of them, or any aspect thereof, is found in Christ. They are outside of Him, and are thus invalid in the things having to do with “life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). They are not part of what God has prepared for those who love Him. The things concerning which Paul has warned the saints do not come from God. They are not Divinely given or distributed. They are rather of man, through man, and to man. Nor, indeed, is the Lord Jesus associated with any of them. They are, in every sense of the word, “not of Christ.” Everything that makes God “God” is found in the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. No essential attribute of God is not found in Jesus Christ. These things are not simply found in Him, they belong in Him, or are at home in Him. He is the appointed repository for every Divine quality or characteristic. There is nothing that is exclusively resident in God, or comes uniquely from God, that is not found in Christ. Therefore, the fact that He is “the MAN Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5) puts these things within the reach of those who are in Him! This is the point

that will be developed in the following verses, and it is powerful. Faith is the means employed to take hold of these indispensable verities. Further, none of them are mere theological novelties, but are essential in the matter of our salvation. When we “put on the new man” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10) a hunger and thirst for righteousness is awakened, together with desires to do the will of the Lord and please Him. It is at that point that gratefulness rises in the heart for access to Divine qualities. This makes this passage particularly precious. It confirms to our hearts that in the Lord Jesus, to whom we are “joined” (1 Cor 6:17) and “married” (Rom 7:4), everything required for life and godliness is resident and available to the believer.

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Chapter 7

BODILY

““For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead BODILY.”

Other versions read, “living form” (BBE), “corporeally” (DOUAY), “bodily form” (NIB), and “a human body” (NLT).

This is the only place in Scripture where this precise word is used – as an adverb. Elsewhere the English version contains the word “bodily” in an adjective form: “bodily shape like a dove” (Lk 3:22), “bodily presence” (2 Cor 10:10), and “bodily exercise” (1 Tim 4:8). The “fulness” of the Holy Spirit was not resident in the dove that rested upon Jesus. The fulness of Paul’s person was not contained in his “bodily presence.” The full ramifications of “exercise” are not found in “bodily exercise.” However, the “fulness of the Godhead” was incarnated, or enfleshed, in Christ Jesus, and continues to dwell within Him.

The word “bodily” points to the incarnation of the Word, when “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). When Jesus was called “Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matt 1:23), a mere token presence was not the point – such as the limited manifestation of God at Sinai. God, in all of His fulness, is resident in “the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). That is why, in Christ, it is written that “God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16).

In the light of this declaration, several of Christ’s expressions can be more clearly understood.

1. “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).
2. “He that believeth on Me, believeth not on Me, but on Him that sent Me” (John 12:44).
3. “He that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me” (Mat 10:40).
4. “He that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me” (Luke 10:16).
5. “And he that seeth Me seeth Him that sent Me” (John 12:45).
6. “Then said they unto Him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know Me, nor My Father: if ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also” (John 8:19).

Because “the fulness of the Godhead” dwells “bodily” in Christ, He is referred to as “the righteous” (1 John 2:1), “the holy One” (Mk 1:24), and “the great God and Savior” (Tit 2:13). This is why He was worshiped (Matt 2:11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 18:26; 28:9,17). This is why “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Phil 2:10). Eventually, His supremacy will be acknowledged by all.

In Christ Jesus, all of the Divine attributes meet together for the accomplishment of salvation. This is a fulfillment of the Davidic

psalm, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psa 85:10).

A PROFOUND STATEMENT

There can be no question about the profundity of this statement. Jesus was, as some theological statements have affirmed, “fully man and fully God.” This, of course, is a “great mystery” to the flesh. Yet, it can be “acknowledged” by faith, bringing confidence, joy, and understanding to the believing heart (Col 2:2).

In Jesus, anything that appeared to contradict the Divine nature was a voluntary expression of His own will – not a manifestation of inherent inferiority or limitation. A few examples will serve to illustrate this point.

1. Jesus increased in wisdom and stature (Lk 2:52a).
2. Jesus grew in favor with God (Lk 2:52b).
3. Jesus was tempted (Heb 2:18; 4:15).
4. Jesus hungered (Matt 4:2).
5. Jesus thirsted (John 19:28).
6. Jesus was weary (John 4:6).

7. Jesus prayed with strong crying and tears (Heb 5:7a).

8. Jesus feared (Heb 5:7b).

9. Jesus learned obedience (Heb 5:8).

10. Jesus died (Rom 5:6,8).

Some have viewed these texts as evidence that Jesus was not Divine. However, these do not describe the essential nature of Christ Jesus. Rather, they are what He voluntarily took upon Himself (Heb 5:5-9). This was involved in Jesus “humbling Himself,” becoming “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:8). He divested Himself of the prerogatives of Deity, sheathing, as it were, the sword of Divinity. He submitted to the subduing of expression, yet remained “God,” just as the Father said (Heb 1:8).

The humility of Christ pertains to His tenure in this world – commencing with His birth, and concluding with His death. During that period, He did not appear to be God “manifest in the flesh” – yet He was, as His transfiguration confirmed (Matt 17:2; Mk 9:2-3). Now, the Lord Jesus is no more restricted by His manhood. His sword is no longer sheathed, and He is no more tempted.

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Chapter 8

COMPLETE IN HIM

“And ye are complete in Him . . .” Other versions read, “In Him you have been made complete” (NASB), “you have been given fullness in Christ” (NIV), “you have come to fullness in Him” (NRSV), “ye are made full” (ASV), and “find your own fulfilment” (NJB).

Only a Savior who is Himself complete, having “all the fulness of the Godhead,” can make a people complete.

Everything that God has reserved for you, or requires of you, is found in Christ Jesus. Nothing that you truly need can be obtained anywhere else. Christ is not merely one of many resources, He is our exclusive Resource. Satisfaction cannot be realized from anyone or anything else. There is not a single aspect of adequacy that can be realized apart from Him. What you need is found in Christ alone. What God requires of you is found only in Jesus. The satisfaction of heart and mind that men crave can only be realized in the Person of Jesus Christ.

There are no unfilled chasms in Christ Jesus – no voids, and no moral or spiritual deserts. Everything you need for both time and eternity are resident in Jesus, and are therefore dispensed by Him. All of this is involved in Christ’s statement concerning Himself, “For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself” (John 5:26).

It is ever true, “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:12). That is life in all of its fulness – the fulness God intended in the creation, and particularly, the re-creation, of men.

If it is true that we are “complete in Him,” then there is no completeness independently of Him. No person who is not in fellowship with Christ, regardless of their purported advancement, has reached their potential. In fact, such people do not entertain the faintest notion about what and who they could be.

The impact that this knowledge – that we are “complete in Him” – is expressed wonderfully by the Apostle Paul. “But whatever

things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:7-14, NASB).

We are “complete in Him!” All that we need is found in Him to whom we have been joined (1 Cor 6:17). If it is wisdom and knowledge, it is “in Him.” If it is “righteous, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit,” it is “in Him.” If it is strength, comfort, and peace, it is “in Him.” God has nothing to give us outside of Christ. There is no spiritual or eternal advantage that can come from any other source. There are no supplements to Jesus, nothing that can be added to Him to cause greater effectiveness or Kingdom utility. In every sense, we are “complete in Him.”

The point of this text is most sobering. In matters pertaining to life and godliness, whatever does not come from Christ, when received, removes us from Christ, making the graces resident in Him inaccessible to us. There is no neutrality in this issue. Everything required for salvation, both in this world and the one to come, is

found in Christ alone.

No one can be made more spiritual in any sense by resources that are not ministered by the Lord Jesus. It is essential that this is seen. This is the case because God will not allow anything pertaining to salvation to be realized apart from Christ.

If the “fulness of the Godhead” dwells bodily in Christ, it should be readily apparent that none of that fulness can be appropriated apart from Him. It cannot be obtained from nature, government, or the wisdom of this world in any of its varied forms.

Through the Spirit, Paul will now proceed to expound this reality. He will show that there is no adversarial or beneficial power that is not under Him. IN regeneration, everything that we have been made or that we have experienced has been through Him. The total victory over the foes that had enslaved us was wrought by Christ, and Christ alone.

All true satisfaction comes from Jesus alone. That is why He said to the woman at the well, “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

All spiritual aptitude comes from Him alone. As it is written, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil 4:13). That is why it is also written, “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord

Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him” (1 Cor 8:6).

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 9

THE HEAD OF ALL PRINCIPALITY AND POWER

“ . . . which is the Head of all principality and power . . . ”

Whether men wish to acknowledge it or not, there are superior powers with which they have to do. Some of them are adversarial, and some are friendly to those who are in Christ Jesus. Man is not sufficient of himself to subdue these adversarial powers, or harness powers that bring eternal advantage. When it comes to the vast

spiritual host all about us, we ourselves are vastly inferior to them in every way. They are of a higher order than mankind, who, in his pristine state, was “made a little lower than the angels” (Psa 8:4-5; Heb 2:6-7).

THE HEAD

“ . . . which is the Head . . . ” Another version read, “He is the Lord over” (NLT).

The word “Head” means “supreme, chief, prominent” (THAYER), “designating first, or superior in rank” (ROBERTSON).

1. First, Jesus is “Head” because He is “before all things” (Col 1:17) – that is, He Himself was not created, but is before all [created] things.
2. Second, He is “Head” because everything that was made was created by Him: “All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3).
3. Third, He is “Head” because all things that are created are held together by Him, thus serving one grand eternal purpose: “and by Him all things consist,” or “hold together” NIV (Col 1:17b). Again, it is written that He is “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Heb 1:3).

The Lord Jesus is not a figurehead, or one that is superior in name only. In the earth, there are individuals who are symbolically over

others, yet can be effectively resisted by those under them – even assassinated by one of their subordinates. The Lord Jesus, however, is not one that OUGHT to be “Head,” He IS the “Head.” What He does cannot be undone by another. What He command stands “fast,” and cannot be countermanded by the word or action of another (Psa 33:9).

The ultimate commands all come from Him. All other commands are, at the very best, temporary, and must eventually yield to His word, unless they are uttered by someone who has been joined to Him (1 Cor 6:17), has His mind (2 Cor 2:16), and has been sent by Him to speak His word. Jesus said to His apostles, “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me” (Luke 10:16). Even then, however, those duly designated men could speak away men like Pilate and Herod, or cause men to believe. They were subordinates, key members of the body of Christ, but were not themselves the Head. Although they were placed “first” in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:28), they were subject to the Head who was over them.

Christ’s Headship is affirmed numerous places. In every case a sense of Divine pungency is perceived.

1. “But I would have you know, that the HEAD of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor 11:3).

2. “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the HEAD over all things to the church” (Eph 1:22)

3. “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the HEAD, even Christ” (Eph 4:15).

4. “And he is the HEAD of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Col 1:18).

5. “And not holding the HEAD, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col 2:19).

6 “Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the HEAD of the corner” (1 Pet 2:7).

When it comes to the execution of the “eternal purpose” of God, “the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5) is “THE Head.” “All power in heaven and in earth” has been given to Him (Matt 28:18). It is not possible, therefore, for any needed resource to be obtained independently of Him. He is, in every sense of the word, “over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:5).

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh

by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 10

ALL PRINCIPALITY AND POWER

“ . . . of all principality and power.” Other versions read, “all rule and authority” (NASB), “every power and authority” (NIV), “every ruler and authority” (NRSV), and “every sovereignty and ruling force” (NJB).

The word “principality” emphasizes being first over a certain order or domain. It has to do with nature as well as rank. The word “power” underscores authority, showing that the personality involved possesses the ability to govern the area over which he presides – an ability that is delegated by the ultimate Head, who is Christ. Here are some examples of delegated power.

1. The entire angelic order, sent to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation (Heb 12:13-14).

2. An evil host of spiritual opponents against whom the saints “wrestle” (Eph 6:12).
3. Michael, who stands for the people of Israel (Dan 10:21; 12:1).
4. Angel over the waters (Rev 16:5).
5. Angel over the fire (Rev 14:18).
6. Angels having control of the four winds (Rev 7:1).
7. Prince of Persia (Dan 10:20a).
8. Prince of Grecia (Dan 10:20b).
9. Satan, who is the prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:2).
10. Angel who can open or close the bottomless pit (Rev 9:1-2; 20:1).
11. Demons who perpetrate damnable doctrines (1 Tim 4:1).
12. Wicked spirits to transform themselves into “ministers of

righteousness” (2 Cor 11:14).

There is spiritual hierarchy of authority that is staggering for depth. It includes personalities “that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, [and] powers” (Col 1:16).

1. On the holy side there are holy angels (Matt 25:31), archangels (1 Thess 4:16), principalities (Eph 3:10a), powers (Eph 3:10b), seraphim (Isa 6:2,6), cherubim (Gen 3:24; 2 Sam 22:11), and living creatures (Rev 4:6).

2. On the evil side, there are principalities (Eph 6:12a), powers (Eph 6:12b), the rulers of the darkness of this world (Eph 6:12c), spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph 6:12d), demons (James 2:10), familiar spirits (Isa 19:3), unclean spirits (Acts 8:7), spirit of infirmity (Lk 13:11), dumb and deaf spirits (Mk 9:25), and Satan, who is “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2) and “the god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4). Jesus referred to this entire conglomeration of evil as “the power of darkness” (Lk 22:53). As the Head over all, Jesus has delivered us from this power (Col 1:13).

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the

operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 11

WE REQUIRE SUCH A HEAD

The salvation of fallen man requires a Savior who is “over all” (Rom 9:5). Men are not saved by a Divine fiat, the means by which the worlds were created (Heb 11:3). Through the exalted Christ, God is WORKING salvation in the midst of the earth (Psa 74:12). He is WORKING all things together for the good of those who love Him, and are the called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28). He is WORKING in the saints “both to do and to will of His good pleasure” (Phil 2:12). Such a large work requires a Sovereign, into whose hand all power and authority have been committed – both adversarial and supportive powers . Such a Savior must have “power over all flesh” (John 17:2), having triumphed over all opposing influences as well.

For example, let it be clear that it simply is not possible to safely navigate from earth to glory without the holy angels ministering to us. Men require such a ministration, and that is why it has been provided. As it is written of them, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb 1:14). Furthermore, it is not possible to overcome

the power of darkness without a Savior who reigns over that domain, as well as the holy angels who minister to us. Salvation does not enable us to navigate to glory on our own, independently of Divine resources. Rather, the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:24) achieves at least three things.

1. It forgives and removes our sins, justifying us “from all things” (Eph 1:7; Acts 13:39).
2. It qualifies us to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light (Col 1:12).
3. It positions us where the needed resources may be obtained. This is described as “the kingdom of” God’s “dear Son” (Col 1:13), and “in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6).

Being so blessed and situated, and drawing upon the provided resources, described as “all spiritual blessings” (Eph 1:3), and “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3), we can now go about the business of working out our “own salvation with far and trembling” (Phil 2:12), knowing that it is God who is working in us “both to will and to do of His own good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13).

Men – even redeemed men – have no ability to marshal the power of a single angel to work in their behalf, let alone “an innumerable company of angels” (Heb 12:22). What person is able to restrain the devil, or any of his horde of wicked spirits, by natural ability, or independently of the exalted Savior? Is there any form of education capable of this assignment? What spiritual tool has been invented by men that will actually assist us in “perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord” (2 Cor 7:1), going “on unto perfection” (Heb 6:1), or successfully fighting “the good fight of faith” and

laying “hold on eternal life” (1 Tim 6:12). Who does not see the absolute necessity of Jesus Christ in the entirety of salvation, from its initiation to its culmination?

If Jesus is not presently the “Head of all principality and power,” salvation in any of its multifarious facets is simply impossible! We are, in every sense of the word, “complete in Him,” and totally and irremediably incomplete without Him!

There is no power that does not bow to Jesus when perceiving Him. That will be substantiated when the Lord Jesus appears in all of His glory. Then, publically and without exception, “at the name of Jesus every knee [will] bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Phil 2:10). If the present absolute and total authority of the exalted Christ not a reality, it would not be possible for anyone to be saved. No one could pass from death unto life or finish the course that has been set before them. The people of God need to hear the affirmation of Christ’s Headship frequently. It is not enough to speak of “a coming reign of the Lord Jesus,” we must hear of the present one!

COMPLETE IN CHRIST “For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having

spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15) Chapter 12 THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST #1 “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.”

The Spirit now takes us to a point in time when we experienced deliverance from the power of darkness, and translation into the kingdom of God’s Son (Col 1:13). In this declaration, Christ’s Headship over all is being confirmed. The change in our status was wholly dependent upon the working of Jesus. Our obedience played a role, it is true – but that role was not the decisive one. It is what Jesus did that made the real difference. This does not minimize our obedience, or suggest that it was not necessary. That is such a rudimentary observation, it should not be necessary to elaborate further upon it. The fact that the Spirit takes us back to the point of our obedience confirms it was not incidental. However, the point He will make is what the Lord Jesus did at that time. It is imperative that believers learn how to reason concerning their own salvation. While the obedience of the believer is imperative, it is not the cause of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17). From one viewpoint, obedience positions us for the experience of the salvation itself. However, were it not for the working of the Lord, obedience would be to no effect. I come from a background where we were taught to glory in the obedience itself. Even then, it was not the whole of obedience, but only a facet of it. The result of that kind of glorying is seen in the people it produced. They simply were not noted for the things that “accompany salvation” (Heb 6:9). Such things as a strong faith (Rom 4:20), seeking the things that are above (Col 3:1-2), “full assurance” (Col 2:2; Heb 6:11; 10:22), and “the love of the truth” (2 The3ss 2:10) were virtually unknown among the people. They were not noted for loving the brethren (John 13:35; 1 John 3:14), being “of the same mind” and “the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10), or the doing of righteousness was certainly not their strong point (1 John 2:20; 3:7). I suppose a host of reasons could be cited for these lamentable conditions. However, high in their

ranking would be the fact that there was actually little glorying in the Lord. There may even have been a prevailing ignorance about what that means. In delineating God's "great salvation" (Heb 2:3), Paul will lead our minds to consider what Jesus did when we "obeyed from the heart the form of the doctrine" (Rom 6:17) – when we were "baptized into Jesus Christ," even "into His death" (Rom 6:3). He will not shake our hands, so to speak, because we were baptized, but will tell us what took place at that time. IN WHOM "In whom also . . ." Other versions read, "In Him you were also" (NKJV/NASB/NIV). Here a most significant point is being made. First, in regard to our experience, this is something that took place "IN" Christ. Until we were in some way joined to Him, the benefit now declared did not take place. Second, while the Lord Jesus is, indeed, the "Head of all principality and power," the power and authority associated with that Headship must be employed in a personal work within us. That is the significance of the word "also." That is, not only is Jesus the Sovereign over all power, He employed that power in accomplishing a specific work within us. That work involved the subduing of inimical powers, as well as the creation of a new condition within us. Nothing of eternal significance can take place within a person until he is "in Christ" – until he is united with Him. This is a unity that can only be effected by the Lord. It is too challenging for created personalities to accomplish. YE ARE CIRCUMCISED " . . . ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, . . ." Other versions read, "circumcised with a circumcision made without hands" (NASB), "not with a circumcision done by the hands of men" (NIV), "circumcised with a spiritual circumcision" (NRSV), "circumcised, but not by a physical procedure" (NLT). It is imperative that we regard this as a proclamation of something essential to our salvation, for Jesus does not do unnecessary things. What is here described is an aspect of being saved, and there is no one saved without this action taking place.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 13

THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST #2

CIRCUMCISION OF OLD TIME

The circumcision that is now expounded was introduced in type by a circumcision that was made with hands. That circumcision was first given to Abraham as a “token of the covenant” God made with him, to bless the world through his offspring (Gen 17:11). Like all types and shadows, that circumcision was not a precise depiction of what would be fulfilled in Christ Jesus. However, it did confirm that something would be severed from the saved. It would be in a private and unseen part of their person, and it would result in a sensitivity that had been restrained by nature.

A PROMISE UNDER THE LAW

Before Israel entered the promised land, Moses told the people of their hard-heartedness, and of the necessity of inward modification. First, he challenged the people to change their own nature: “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked” (Deu 10:16). Those who took the matter seriously soon found such a thing could not be accomplished in the flesh, or the energy of nature. That is precisely why, centuries later, David cried out, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa 51:10). He knew if the Lord did not do this, it simply would not be done.

Moses did not leave the matter wholly in the hands of the people, but told them of a coming time when God Himself would circumcise their hearts. “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deut 30:6).

Notice the marvelous result of the circumcision of the heart. The people would then love the Lord with all their heart and soul. The Law demanded that such a love be yielded, yet gave no power for it to be accomplished. However, “what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh” (Rom 8:3), God Himself would accomplish through a spiritual circumcision.

A PROMISE THROUGH THE PROPHETS

Moses was not the only one who spoke of the necessity of an inner, or spiritual, circumcision. The prophets also spoke of this

requirement. Jeremiah cried out, “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings” (Jer 4:4). Ezekiel prophesied similarly: “Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek 18:31).

The Prophets described the people as “uncircumcised in the heart” (Jer 9:26; Ezek 44:7,9). Stephen also charged his generation with being “uncircumcised in heart and ears” (Acts 7:51).

In these prophecies God was confirming He would not save men eternally while they remained in a state of rebellion. Unless men were intrinsically and essentially changed, they would not be saved. Thus the prophets followed Moses’ example, calling upon the people to change themselves. In both cases – with Moses and with the Prophets – God was confirming the impotence of nature, and the essentiality of a Divine working in salvation.

The prophets also heralded a time when the Living God would accomplish the renewal that was required in mankind. Ezekiel described the work in this way: “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezek 11:19- 20). Again Ezekiel wrote, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my

statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ezek 36:26-27).

Again, notice the result of this wonderful work. (1) They would walk in His statutes. (2) They would keep His ordinances and do them. (3) They would be God’s people. (4) God would be their God. In other words, the fundamental nature and character of the people would be changed. The people would no longer be rebellious, but would be “willing in the day of His power” (Psa 110:4).

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 14

THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST #3

CONFIRMED BY THE APOSTLES

Paul confirms the reality of this change in the essential nature of men that is realized in Christ Jesus. “But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, IN THE SPIRIT, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Rom 2:29).

This “circumcision” is what constitutes those in Christ a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17).

THE BODY OF THE SINS OF THE FLESH

“ . . . in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh . . . ” Other versions read, “BY putting off . . . ” (NKJV), “in the removal of the body of the flesh” (NASB), “In the putting off of the sinful nature” (NIV), “in despoiling of the body of the flesh” (DOUAY), “by stripping off the carnal body” (NAB), “the complete stripping of your natural self” (NJB), and “the cutting away of your sinful nature” (NLT).

A PRECISE SURGICAL PROCEDURE

If circumcision in the flesh was an exacting procedure, much more is the circumcision in heart and spirit. Here the circumcision is the removal of something called “the body of the sins of the flesh.” In the cases of Abraham, and under the Law, only a token amount of the flesh was removed. In Christ, the work is more thorough.

The “body” refers to the entirety of the fleshly, or carnal, nature. It

is equivalent to the removal of the “stony heart” of Ezekiel (Ezek 36:26), and the taking away of “all thy tin (alloy)” of Isaiah (Isa 1:25). In the book of Romans, the same procedure is called the destroying of “the body of sin” (Rom 6:6).

Sin has caused a spiritual growth upon the heart that deadened men toward the Lord, rendering them spiritually insensitive. Scripture refers to this condition as being “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1), “dead in sins” (Eph 2:5), and “dead in your sins” (Col 2:13). This state was part of our essential makeup – it was really what we were. As such, we could have no real identity with the Lord. It was imperative that this corrupt nature be separated from our essential persons. That is precisely what this circumcision accomplished.

NOT THE OBLITERATION OF THE FLESH

Contrary to the thinking of some, this operation did not obliterate “the flesh,” so that it no longer existed. The “body of sin” was “destroyed” in the same sense Satan was destroyed by the death of Christ (Heb 2:14). It was rendered powerless in the domain of the Spirit, or the “heavenly places.” To put it another way, we are no longer obligated to the sinful nature, as we were prior to being in Christ. This is precisely what is affirmed by the words, “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh” (Rom 8:12).

At the point of this circumcision, we became a dual personality – “the old man” and “the new man” (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10). Although experientially, it seems as though “the old man” is actually part of our primary person, this is not the case at all. Having been cut away from us, “the old man,” or “body of the sins of the flesh,” is like an intruder, taking up residence in our bodies.

He is like the impenitent thief upon the cross (Lk 23:39). He shouts and he makes demands, yet he is in the midst of death throes. He has been cut away from the person in Christ – “circumcised.” In Christ He is no longer integral to our real persons, which have fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9).

The practical result of this blessed “circumcision” is that we no longer desire to sin, nor do we find pleasure in it. We are fundamentally Christ-centered instead of self-centered. The fleshly inclinations that we once nourished are now subdued in the power of the Spirit. That is why it is written, “And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24). Note, the Spirit does not say this is something those in Christ should do, but something they have done. It is not a goal, but a reality. This is what happens when we are “circumcised with the circumcision not made with hands.” It is not that we no longer have to contend with sinful desires. However, now that we are in Christ, those desires do not emanate from who we are in Christ, but from the part that has been cut away in the circumcision of Christ.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way,

nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 15

THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST #4

NOT IN THE FLESH, BUT IN THE SPIRIT

The blessed transaction that is being described is not a mythical one, or one existing only in type. This is a very real circumcision – a very real removal of the sinful nature from our essential persons – dividing it asunder, so to speak. The Spirit testifies to us of its reality, then calls upon us to shape our thinking around this fact. This is what is intended by the following admonition: “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11). Thus we are summoned to think in strict accord with what has actually taken place in Christ Jesus.

THE REMNANT OF THE FLESH REMAINS

At this point, many believers have become confused. The demands of the carnal nature are often so strong that the child of God imagines those demands are expressions of his real person. Here is where we must learn to reason as Paul did. After experiencing the expressions of the “old man,” or “flesh,” Paul found he was unable to stop these very expressions at the thought level. He found himself confronting thoughts he did not want to have, yet could not stop from entering his mind. Referring to these thoughts, or

imaginings, here is what he said. “For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I . . . Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me . . . I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me . . . But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom 7:15,17,21,23).

Paul knew his heart had been circumcised, and yet the remnants of what was cut off remained within his body. That fleshly remnant could not be part of his renewed heart, but found residence in his “vile body” (Phil 3:21), which has not yet been renewed. As repulsive as the expressions were that erupted from the “old man,” Paul knew they were not really coming from his new heart and spirit. He therefore took delight in anticipating his coming deliverance from the body. When that deliverance came, he would have done with the expressions of the “old man.” Thus he said, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom 7:24-25).

The glory of this insight is that it confirmed Paul’s justification, for where sin is genuinely hated, and righteousness is really loved, justification has taken place. This is why Paul breaks forth in praise in the eighth chapter of Romans. “There is therefore [in view of the warfare between the flesh and the spirit] now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:1).

MY OWN EXPERIENCE

I can testify that insight into this circumcision constituted one of the greatest deliverances of my life. Once I saw what Jesus had actually accomplished in my own regeneration, sin lost its power over me. When I perceived that there were really two personalities living in my body, and that one of them did not belong to me, I was finally able to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,” living “soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” (Tit 2:11-12). I was able to come with boldness to “the throne of grace,” to “obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need” (Heb 4:16).

And when, due to my own weakness, I found that I had sinned, yielding to the part of my person that had been circumcised from me, I was able to confess my sins to God, and obtain the cleansing I craved (1 John 1:9). Then I was able to realize the power of 1 John 2:1: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous” (1 John 2:1).

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and

powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 16

THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST #5

“ . . . by the circumcision of Christ.” This is “the circumcision done by Christ” NIV Himself.

When this circumcision was accomplished, your stony heart was removed, and you were given a heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26). This is when God put His Spirit within you (Ezek 36:27), sending Him into your heart, because you were His son (Gal 4:6). This is when God put His laws into your mind, and wrote them upon your heart (Heb 8:10). They were written upon your “new heart,” and put into your “new spirit” (Ezek 11:19).

This is the circumcision described in Romans 2:29 – one that is “of the heart, in the Spirit” (NKJV). Everyone who is in Christ Jesus experiences this circumcision. Because of that circumstance, the saints are thus described: “For we are THE CIRCUMCISION, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3). Those in Jesus are not people who OUGHT to worship, but those who DO worship Him. They are not people SHOULD rejoice in Christ Jesus, but those who DO rejoice in Him. They are not individuals who are under an obligation to not have confidence in the flesh, but those who actually have NO confidence in the flesh.

Those are the results of being circumcised with the circumcision made without hands.

Much of the professing church has not done well in presenting these realities. The result has been a general state of spiritual weakness among those who could be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Too, the church has every right to expect professing believers to be a “new creation,” not having the mark of the world upon them.

BURIED WITH HIM IN BAPTISM

“ . . . Buried with Him in baptism . . . ”

How will the Spirit elaborate on this most blessed condition – being circumcised by Jesus, and having the whole body of the sins of the flesh cut away from the part of us that is born of God? When will He say this occurred? Is there some event – some point in time – to which He will point us?

The gravity of the event that has just been described must be emphasized. This is something that Jesus Christ Himself has accomplished – “the circumcision of Christ.” This is not something that was accomplished by man – it is a circumcision “made without hands.” It has not dealt with some sin, or some sinful expressions, but with “the removal of the body of the flesh.”

Is there a person of sound mind in all the world who will affirm

this is something that is optional? Who will dare to declare that any person standing before the Lord of glory can do without this circumcision? Should such a person exist, we will simply stop our ears and refuse to listen to him. Such an individual is “subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself” (Tit 3:11).

Once the necessity of this circumcision is acknowledged, with what will it be associated? The Spirit will now speak “expressly.” He does so because something of this magnitude will have no power if we are unable to relate to it.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 17 of 33

BURIED WITH HIM

“Buried with Him . . . ” Part of the Gospel is the burial of Christ: “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; AND THAT HE WAS BURIED, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor 15:1-4).

The burial of Christ is to redemption what the scape goat was to the day of atonement (Lev 16:8-26). After the sins of the people were symbolically transferred to this goat (vs 21-22), it was led by a fit man into “a land not inhabited,” and there released. This foreshadowed Jesus, the “Lamb of God,” taking away the sins of the world, bearing them, as it was, into “the land of forgetfulness” (Psa 88:12).

Think of it this way: when Jesus was on the cross, He “His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24). However, when He rose from the dead, those sins were not in His resurrection body. They had been effectively “taken away.” Christ’s burial, in which He was identified with “the wicked” (Isa 53:9), is also a point in which we become identified with Him. We are, it is affirmed, “buried WITH HIM.”

Now the Spirit will identify when this burial took place. He does not leave it to men to conjecture when Jesus circumcised them, cutting away from their essential persons the whole sinful nature. This is too important for men to attempt to find it by groping about in theological darkness. Too much depends on the awareness of this for it to be vague and ambiguous.

IN BAPTISM

“ . . . in baptism . . . ” The preponderance of versions read “IN baptism.” A few versions read differently, but with the same sense: “through baptism” (GENEVA), “by your baptism” (NJB), and “when you were baptized” (NLT).

Because this verse impinges upon some of the cherished traditions of men, it is very difficult for some to receive. However, the Scriptures are too clear on this matter to justify any confusion among believers concerning it.

This is the “one baptism” that is affirmed in Ephesians 4:5). It is the baptism Jesus referenced when He told His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mat 28:19). Concerning this baptism, He also promised, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

Those who contend this refers to being baptized with the Spirit are simply wrong. That baptism is something Jesus Himself performs (Matt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; John 1:33). This is a baptism His people accomplish.

This baptism is also set forth in the history of the Apostles as the point at which people became identified with Christ. Peter commanded the convicted sinners on the day of Pentecost to “be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins”

(Acts 2:38). Those who “gladly received the word were baptized” (Acts 2:41). When the people in Samaria believed Philip’s preaching “they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12). Upon his confession that he believed “Jesus Christ is the Son of God,” the Ethiopian eunuch was “baptized” (Acts 8:36-38). Upon beholding the repentance of Saul of Tarsus, Ananias told him, “arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 9:18; 22:16). Peter commanded the household of Cornelius to be baptized in water (Acts 10:47-48). Upon hearing the Gospel, and having her heart opened by the Lord, Lydia and her household were “baptized” (Acts 16:15). Upon hearing the Gospel, the Philippian jailor, “he and all his,” were straightway baptized “the same hour of the night” (Acts 16:33). Many of the Corinthians, hearing the Gospel “believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). Upon hearing that the Messiah had come, certain disciples of John “were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5).

“BURIED”

Baptism is elsewhere called “the form of the doctrine” (Rom 6:17) – that is, it is outward depiction of the Gospel, which is “the doctrine.” Just as Jesus was buried “in the heart of the earth” (Matt 12:40), so those who are baptized are “buried” in the water. However, the point here is not the burial itself, but THE ONE with whom we are identified in that burial. This does not diminish the significance of the form, but even lends more weight to it. A “form” that does not precisely portray the truth of which it is the form, is meaningless.

Baptism is only valid when a person is “buried WITH Christ.” Note, the text does not say “LIKE Christ,” but “WITH Christ.” In further instruction concerning our baptism, the book of Romans

also makes a point of this. “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death” (Rom 6:4).

In this picture, there is a difference between our burial and that of our Lord. Jesus died, and was then buried. His death preceded His burial. But that is not the case when we are “buried with Him.” We are buried INTO death – “buried with Him by baptism INTO DEATH.” Therefore the powerful question is asked, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?” (Rom 6:3).

The “circumcision of Christ” occurred IN our baptism – when we were “buried WITH HIM.” That is when the spiritual surgery took place that brought a certain dichotomy to our persons, creating the “new man,” and leaving the “old man.” This is why the Spirit phrases the teaching so precisely. Speaking of our baptism, the text reads, “wherein,” or “in which we were . . . ” (NIV).

What shall we say of those who denigrate baptism, leaving the impression that it is unimportant, having nothing whatsoever to do with salvation? Those who choose to affirm such things have only betrayed their ignorance. Such miserable teaching is suggesting the circumcision of Christ has nothing to do with salvation. They are saying being buried with Christ is unrelated to salvation. They are affirming that the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh is not associated with salvation. These postulates are such absurdities, they deserve no other explanation.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 18

BAPTISM ASSOCIATED WITH CHANGE

Baptism has become a subject for debate among professing Christians. Some say it is not associated with salvation, some say it is. Some say it is essential to the experience of salvation, and some say it is not. Some say it is a sign that we are in Christ Jesus, while others say it is one of the means of coming into Christ Jesus. Considering what God has said about baptism, it is disgraceful for men to argue about it. It is the responsibility of men to believe what God has said, and to shape their lives accordingly.

There are a number of things with which our baptism into Christ is associated – and they are all directly related to salvation itself.

Being Identified with Christ's Death – "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Rom 6:3)

Being Identified with Christ's Resurrection – "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." (Col 2:12)

Being In Christ – "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal 3:27)

Washing Away Sin – "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16)

Through it, the remission of sins is realized – "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38)

The Gift of the Holy Spirit – "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38)

The Circumcision of Christ – "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body

of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." (Col 2:11-12)

Having Faith in the Operation of God – "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." (Col 2:12)

A CHANGE OF LIFE

These texts emphasize the connection of baptism with a change of life. Those in Christ have passed from death to life (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14). They have moved from being in sin to walking in the newness of life (Rom 6:4). Their status has changed from being out of Christ to being in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). Those who were once alienated are now reconciled (Rom 5:10). Their manner of life, which was characterized by darkness, is now said to be walking in newness of life" (Rom 6:4; Eph 5:8).

It is most unfortunate that many who emphasize baptism are not noted for proclaiming or demonstrating the reality of a changed life. Unchanged lives are unacceptable. Whatever obedience an unchanged person may profess to have accomplished is nothing more than a delusion. A salvation that does not change the individual is really no salvation at all. Such a condition would be like Israel boasting of deliverance while they remained enslaved in Egypt.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 19

RISEN WITH HIM

“ . . . wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead.”

The Spirit continues to elaborate on our baptism – something that is held forth as common among all believers. It is a reference point for spiritual reasoning – reasoning that is essential to maintaining a sound mind.

WHEREIN

“ . . . wherein also . . . ” The subject is still that of our baptism

“into Christ” (Gal 3:27). The circumcision of Christ is not the only thing that took place in that obedient act, when we “obeyed from the heart the form of the doctrine” (Rom 6:17). This was obedience filled with significance.

RISEN WITH HIM

“ . . . ye are risen with Him . . . ” Other versions read, “who were also raised with Him” (NKJV), “and raised with Him” (NIV), “by which you came to life again with Him” (BBE), “you are risen again” (DOUAY), “too, you have been raised up with Him” (NJB), and “also ye rose with Him” (YLT).

All of this took place when the individual was baptized into Christ – “therein,” or in that action. Thus, those in Christ have become identified with the essential aspects of the Gospel. We “died with Christ” (Rom 6:8, NKJV), were “buried with Him” (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12), and “also were raised with Him.” NKJV (Col 2:12).

These realities are points from which spiritual reasoning proceeds. They are like pillars of sound spiritual thought upon which God-glorifying conclusions are suspended. Thus we read,

1. “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).
2. “Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Rom 6:8).

3. “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances” (Col 2:20).

4. “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3).

Paul powerfully elaborates on this in the sixth chapter of Romans. He reasons that in Christ, life necessarily follows death. If, in fact, a person has really died with Christ, they will surely be raised to walk in the newness of life. Faith reckons on this reality.

1. “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).

2. “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom 6:5).

3. “Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Rom 6:8).

4. “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11).

It simply is not possible to die with Jesus, and not live together

with Him. It is impossible to be buried into Christ's death and not be raised to walk in the newness of life. To be identified with Jesus in His death and burial, and not receive newness of life would be equivalent to Jesus not being raised from the dead.

If, therefore, a person is not walking in newness of life, there are only two possible explanations for that failure – and neither one is acceptable. Either they were never buried with Christ into His death, or they have returned like a dog to its vomit, and a sow that was washed to its wallowing in the mire (2 Pet 2:2).

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 20

RISEN WITH HIM THROUGH THE FAITH

“ . . . through the faith of . . . ” Several versions read “of faith OF” (DARBY/DOUAY/GENEVA/RWB/WEB/YLT). Other versions read, “through faith in” (NKJV), “through your faith in” (NKJV), “you trusted the” (NLT), and “by the faith of” (DOUAY).

There are three possible views of this verse, and they are reflected in the two differing translations.

1. First, the faith could be “in” what God does. In this case, the objective of the faith is the point – what it is “in.” This would be faith in the power, or ability, of God, to raise the baptized one to newness of life.
2. Second, the faith itself is the evidence of God’s working. Here, the Source of the faith is the point – the faith “of,” or coming from, the operation of God. This would be faith resulting from the power of God; that is, the faith was produced by God.
3. Third, the faith is the belief that the power of God raised Jesus from the dead, as though he said, “through the belief of this fact, that God raised up Jesus.” This would be faith founded upon the Gospel.

There is certainly a sense in which all of these are true. I will speak more directly to this issue in the next devotion.

THE OPERATION OF GOD

“ . . . the operation of God . . . ” Other versions read, “the working

of God” (NKJV/NASB), “in the power of God” (NIV), “the powerful working of God” (ESV), and “the mighty power of God” (NLT).

The word “operation” is taken from, a word meaning “working or efficacy” (STRONG’S) – that is, effective working. This word always means supernatural power, and is never portrayed as originating with men.

Other Scriptural expressions of this power are as follows – all being translated from the same root word. The capitalized words are the ones translated from this root word – “operation.”

1. “The WORKING of His mighty power” (Eph 1:19).
2. “EFFECTUAL WORKING of His power” (Eph 3:7).
3. “The EFFECTUAL WORKING in the measure of every part” (Eph 4:16).
4. “According to the WORKING whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself” (Phil 3:21).
5. “According to His WORKING which WORKETH in me mightily” (Col 1:29).

6. “God shall; send them STRONG delusion” (2 Thess 2:11).

The phrase, “the operation of God,” refers generally to the effective working of God’s power – what it actually accomplishes, versus its potential. This being the case, is faith ever represented as being IN what God is able to do – i.e., the effective working of His power? Or, is faith said to be in the God who does the working? It is my persuasion that the latter is true. Perhaps the sense of this verse is best stated in the Spirit’s affirmation of Abraham’s faith. “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform” (Rom 4:20-21).

While faith is itself the evidence of Divine beneficence and power (Eph 6:23; 2 Pet 1:1; Rom 10:17; 1 Tim 1:14), the point here is not how the faith is obtained, but in its confidence in the God who gave it. The idea is that God had power to raise Jesus from the dead, and He has power to cause us to rise from the waters of baptism to walk in the newness of life. The faith that accompanies our baptism takes a firm hold on both of these realities. The person possessing such faith believes what God has done in Christ, and it is confident of what He will do in us.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the

operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 21

WHO HATH RAISED HIM

“ . . . who hath raised Him from the dead.”

The premier working of Divine power was not raising us to walk in the newness of life, but the raising of Jesus from the dead. That is the greatest display of Divine power of which men can be aware, the consciousness of which fuels our own faith. The Spirit speaks in this manner concerning “the exceeding greatness of His power TO USWARD WHO BELIEVE who believe” – that is, this power is intended for the people of God. It is focused toward them, and they are to avail themselves of it. “And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, ACCORDING TO the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:19-23).

The “operation of God” that took place when we were baptized into Christ was of the same gender, so to speak, as the power that raised Jesus from the dead. It was the same kind of power that took Jesus from the domain of the dead, causing him to be freed from the jaws of death, to triumphantly rise from the dead, ascend into glory, and be made the “Head over all things.” That is the kind of power that is being announced in our text,

Notice the accomplishments of this effective and “mighty power” – “the operation of God.”

1. It raised Jesus from the dead.
2. It set Christ at God’s right hand in the heavenly places.
3. It set Christ far above all principality, power, might, dominion, and every name that is named.
4. It put all things under His feet.
5. It gave Jesus to the church in the capacity of Head over all things.

This power to which the Spirit refers is not theoretic power. It is not mere potential power. This is effective and efficient power. It is power that accomplishes the purpose of God, doing so

unquestionably and thoroughly

“Faith in the operation of God” persuades the heart that God is also able to remove our sins as far from us as the East is from the West (Psa 103:12), and raise us from death with Jesus to walk in the newness of life. That faith is the means through which this triumphant walk is accomplished. It is the appointed way through which God works in us.

Unfortunately, much of the church remains ignorant of the greatness of the power that was present and active in the death and resurrection that is experienced in baptism into Christ. Far too many spend their time explaining why men have to sin, and offering their meager plans for the management of sin. Why not proclaim with insight the effectiveness of Divine power, and urge men to have faith in that glorious working, or “operation”? Why not declare unto those who are in Christ that the Lord can keep them “from falling” (Jude 1:24), and “make” them stand (Rom 14:4), as well as being “faithful and just” to forgive the sins they confess (1 John 1:9). Is not a “good minister” (1 Tim 4:6) obligated by the Lord to announce to men that “the whole armor of God” comes with an effective shield with which they are able “to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (Eph 6:16). Do not the saints have the right to hear that if they will “resist the devil,” he will “flee from” them (James 4:7)? Why would any professing preacher or teacher withhold from his hearers the fact that the “weapons of our warfare” can throw down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor 10:4-5). The same God who forgave our sins, and raised us to walk in newness of life, has also linked us with His most excellent power. No child of God is lacking in the resources required to overcome the world, resist the devil, and find the door of escape that accompanies every temptation (1 Cor 10:13)!

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 22

WE WERE DEAD

“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh . . . ”

The greatness of our salvation is not only seen in what we have become, but in the marvelous deliverance from what we were. Therefore, the Spirit briefly shines the spotlight of inspiration on our past lives. In doing this He is placing the bright jewel of redemption upon the black canvas of our former lives. This will

cause it to shine all the brighter.

BEING DEAD IN YOUR SINS

“And you, being dead in your sin.” Other versions read, “being dead in your trespasses” (NKJV), “dead in your transgressions” (NASB), “dead through your sins” (BBE), “being dead in offences” (DARBY), and “dead because you were sinners” (NJB).

The “newness of life” becomes all the more precious when we perceive that sin had slain us. Speaking of the powerful administration of the Law, Paul said, “For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Rom 7:9). While it is true that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23), it is the Law that passes the judgment upon men, stopping every mouth and causing all the world to “become guilty before God” (Rom 3:19).

The death of reference is toward God; that is, we were separated from Him, and insensitive to Him. We were like Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones (Ezek 37). This was a condition passed upon the entire human race because of Adam’s sin. As it is written, “through the offence of one many be dead” (Rom 5:15). And again, “by one man’s offense death reigned by one” (Rom 5:17). Again, it is written, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). However, that death was not a mere formality, or legal description. It was a very real death, involving a very real separation from the Living God.

The sphere of death in which we were held was that of “sin,” or

“transgressions.” Thus we read, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). And again, “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)” (Eph 2:5). It is said of sin, that is “reigns unto death,” which is its inevitable outcome (Rom 5:21). This is why it is also written, “the sting of death is sin” (1 Cor 15:56) – sin is the poison that induces death toward God.

This is the state from which the mighty power of God raised us when we were “buried with Christ.”

THE UNCIRCUMCISION OF YOUR FLESH

“ . . . and the uncircumcision of your flesh . . . ” We were not only “dead in our sins” – which were our personal transgressions – but in the “uncircumcision” of our flesh.

The “uncircumcision” of reference does not primarily refer to the covenant of circumcision given to Abraham. It is true that, being Gentiles, in itself, rendered us without any hope. As it is written, “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). However, our text goes deeper than this, focusing more on the result of sin than on the result of the lack of a covenant with God.

The phrase “uncircumcision of your flesh” has more immediate reference to what is circumcised by Jesus – “the body of the sins of

the flesh” (2:11). Not only were we “dead” because of what we did, we were also “dead” because of what we were – “by nature children of wrath” (Eph 2:1-2). Death passed upon all men by virtue of their identity with Adam, as well as the fact that “all have sinned.” When Adam died, the whole race died – a condition only God could correct!

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 23

TRANSFORMATION, NOT REFORMATION

The condition of humanity could not be resolved by reformation. No amount of information, direction, or tutelage can resolve death. Dead people cannot be activated by a law – even a law that is good, holy, just, and spiritual (Rom 7:12,14). If God’s Law cannot

change men, or make them alive toward God, human law certainly cannot! The required change can only be accomplished by transformation, regeneration, a new birth, and a bodily resurrection in which this mortal puts on immortality (1 Cor 15:53-54).

Although men have attempted reformation throughout history, it has never been successful – whether on a personal or collective level. It is the nature of fallen man that is defective not merely his words and deeds. He needs a “new heart” and a “new spirit” (Ezek 36:26). He needs “newness of life,” not a restructuring of habits, or a fresh way of doing things. He needs a new mind, new affections, and a new will. Everything has to become new, and old things have to pass away. That is transformation, not reformation.

Sin has blasted the entirety of man’s person, rendering him dead toward God – “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1' Col 2:13). As difficult as it is for some to receive it, only God can do something about this condition. It cannot be resolved with the wisdom of Egypt, the glory of Babylon, or the strength of Rome. The wise men of this world simply cannot do it – even though many of them are trying to do so.

There is not a vestige of goodness in man that can be the basis for reformation – a small part of man that has not been soiled by sin, and devastated by transgression. If there was anything at all in man that could be reshaped into total good, or polished and developed by instruction until a state of Divine acceptance was reached, there would be no need for the new birth, and Jesus would not have declared “Ye MUST be born again” (John 3:7). There would be no need for a new creation if the old one could somehow be made acceptable (2 Cor 5:17). What need would there be for putting on “the new man, which after God is CREATED in righteousness and

true holiness" (Eph 4:24), if "the old man" could be satisfactorily reformed?

Men do not have to be retrained, they must be born again. Humanity does not need a more refined law through which it can be oriented to the Divine Image. The need is for regeneration. New "habits" are not the answer, for God requires that He be loved "with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength" (Mark 12:33). Precisely what is there in the natural human makeup that will allow for him to be instructed into that condition?

THE POINT OF IT ALL

The point of all of this is to establish that we are "complete" in Christ Jesus. In Him we have everything. Without Him we have nothing. Everything you have in Christ Jesus is "new" (2 Cor 5:17). The life in which those in Christ Jesus walk is new (Rom 6:4). Their nature is new (Gal 6:15), and the works they do are of a new order (Eph 2:10). That is what the Spirit is bringing home to our hearts. At the point our lives connect with Jesus, we begin to experience sufficiency and adequacy.

The new creation is not a combination of the old and the new. It is not a refurbishing of the old. Everything in you that is accepted by God is new, and it is all found "in Christ." Just As surely as you are "complete in Him," there is absolutely no inadequacy in Christ Jesus. No supplement that comes from the world is necessary – in fact, the world has nothing to offer you that will make you better before your Maker. Nothing outside of Christ contributes to your salvation. You are complete in Him!

However, if men choose to dwell at a distance from Him, it will surely bring inevitable inadequacy, insufficiency, and eventual death and condemnation. These are results that WILL take place – they are the consequence of neglecting Jesus. That is what is being expounded in this text. If a person depends upon anything other than Jesus, it will result in being condemned by Jesus.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 24

QUICKENED TOGETHER WITH HIM

“ . . . hath He quickened together with Him . . . ” Other versions

read, “He has made alive together with Him” (NKJV), “God made you alive with Christ” (NIV), “to you, I say, He gave life together with Him” (BBE), “He brought you to life along with Him” (NAB), and “He has brought you to life with Him” (NJB).

The text is still speaking about what occurred when we were buried with Christ in baptism. Those human doctrines that speak of baptism as though it obtained no real importance must account for the remarkable associations the Spirit makes with it. None of them are without eternal significance. None of them are optional. All of them are directly related to our association with Christ Jesus.

There are three things to see in this particular phrase – “quicken together with Him.”.

1. First, it is God who has made us alive. To be “quicken” is to be raised from the dead, and it is “God alone , who quickeneth [or gives life to] the dead” (Rom 4:17).
2. Second, He made us alive with Christ. He gave us life through our identity with the resurrected Christ.
3. Third, those who were once “dead” He has made “alive.” The death that gripped us was not metaphorical. We were really dead in sin, and consequently dead toward God in both principle and practice.

QUICKENED

Only one who is “dead” CAN be “quicken.” Death is the state from which God “quicken us,” or made us alive – alive to Him (Eph 2:1,5; Col 2:13).

The real issue before God is LIFE. Jesus came that we might “have life” (John 5:40; 10:10; 20:31). Life has to do with reciprocity – with being responsive to God. It includes being aware of Him, having ears to hear Him, and knowing and understanding Him (John 17:3). Where these qualities do not exist, the individual is “dead” in sins, and must be made alive, or “quicken.”

ONLY GOD CAN QUICKEN

Only God can raise the dead. Godly people have always known this. They have realized that any failure to be pleasing to God was owing to a state of death. Thus the Psalmist prayed, “quicken us, and we will call upon Thy name” (Psa 80:18). When the Psalmist felt himself being laid low in the dust of this world he cried out, “My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken Thou me according to Thy word” (Psa 119:25).

It is sadly true that the modern church, for the most part, has caused people to be content with spiritual deadness. If there is no hearty appetite for the Word of God, many preachers and teachers simply adapt to the situation, thereby protecting their careers and avoiding persecution for the cross of Christ. If the people are not able to “endure sound doctrine,” they will provide intellectual fillers in their presentations that can be more readily endured by the listeners.

Paul wrote to Timothy about a time when such conditions would

exist – and he instructed him on how to address the coming dilemma: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Tim 4:2-5).

The “work of an evangelist” is proclaiming the truth – particularly the Gospel, of Jesus Christ. The Word is to be preached regardless of the circumstances – favorable or unfavorable. Reproof, rebuke, and exhortation are to be ministered “with great patience and careful instruction” (NIV). Timothy was to minister with an acute awareness that a defection was going to occur within the professed church – a defection that would move men to prefer their own desires to those of the Lord. Rather than seeking the will of the Lord, they will gather around themselves preachers and teachers that will feed their own lusts, and tantalize their intellectual bent. That day is upon us!

In such an environment men are not quickened, for that is not the message or manner that provides a setting for the quickening, or making alive, that comes from God alone. The proper environment for spiritual quickening is not one in which the desires of men are being met, but where God is pleased to visit and direct.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and

power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 25

QUICKENED WITH CHRIST

From beginning to end, every aspect of salvation is “with Christ.” No part of redemption is accomplished independently of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is precisely at the point where we become associated with Him that true life begins and is sustained.

Ephesian Elaboration

A parallel passage in the book of Ephesians further opens the glory of this text. There the emphasis is placed on the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, after which the Spirit brings the quickening of the saints into view. This is nothing less than a declaration of the power that is toward the saints – the power that has made them alive, and keeps them alive. The passage is majestic and worthy of the most profound consideration.

“And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all. AND YOU were dead in your trespasses and sins” NASB (Eph 1:19 - 2:1).

The sense of the passage is more clearly seen when we consider verses 21-23 as a parenthetical statement – an elaboration of the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus. The second chapter begins with a continuation of the thought expressed in 1:20: “which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:20). The idea is that we too were raised and seated in heavenly places, which is categorically stated in Ephesians 2:6: “And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6).

This was accomplished provisionally when Jesus was raised from the dead, and made to sit at God’s right hand in the heavenly places. So far as the foundational work, or the basis, of our empowerment is concerned, it was all accomplished when Jesus conquered death and passed triumphantly through the heavens, being seated at God’s right hand. It was realized experientially when we were baptized into Christ Jesus. At that point, working through our faith, we were connected with the resurrected and enthroned Christ, and made partakers of “the power of His resurrection” (Phil 3:10).

THE REASONING

Having died, been buried, raised from the dead, and enthroned at the right hand of the “majesty in the heavens” (Heb 8:1), Jesus was given “all power in heaven and in earth” (Matt 28:18). Now He is “gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him” (1 Pet 3:22). There is nothing that He is lacking. He has no weakness, no deficiency, no inadequacy. There is no power that is not subordinate to Him, the Father Himself being the solitary exception (1 Cor 15:27). He is in every sense of the word “complete,” thorough, adequate, and sufficient. He is fully able to bring to completion the “eternal purpose” of God. He can bring the sons to glory (Heb 2:10), lacking nothing that is required for that challenging work.

Now, we were quickened together “with Him” – made alive together with Him. Provisionally and legally that association was made when Jesus was exalted. The realization, or actualization of that experience took place when we were buried with Christ, and raised from the baptismal waters by the “glory of the Father” (Rom 6:4).

If, in fact, there is no inadequacy in Jesus, then we are “complete in Him.” If He lacks nothing in the work of bringing us to God, then it is not possible for us to lack anything in Him. If everything has been given to Him, then in Him everything is accessible to us. In confirmation of this it is written, “Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's” (1 Cor 3:23).

Who is the person who will, in any sense or to any degree, attempt to seek adequacy outside of Christ? Where is the professing Christian who will dare to suggest there are needed resources outside of the risen Christ? All such efforts are futile. We are “complete in Him” – in every possible sense of the word! That is all involved in God quickening us from the dead.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 26

FORGIVEN ALL TRESPASSES

“ . . . having forgiven you all trespasses . . . ” Other versions read,

“having forgiven us all our transgressions” (NASB), “He forgave all your sins” (NIV), “WHEN He forgave us all our trespasses” (NRSV), and “having forgiven us all the offences” (DARBY).

The only thing that separated men from God was sin. As it is written, “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear” (Isa 59:2). Hear the Lord as He testifies to Israel: “Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you” (Jer 5:25). The instant sin entered into the world, a separation formed between God and man, “for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor 6:14).

Unless the dilemma of sin is resolved, there is no hope of mankind being recovered. The sinner possesses no recovering power. Sin removes the capacity to recover, regain, or start over. In order to be recovered, man must be acted upon. He must be delivered (Rom 7:6), raised (Eph 2:6), saved (Eph 2:5,8), lifted (James 4:10), quickened (Eph 2:5), justified (Rom 8:30), and sanctified (1 Cor 6:11). This is all accomplished in the “quickening” of reference.

ALL TRESPASSES

The glorious announcement is that we have been forgiven “ALL trespasses” – and that means precisely what it affirms. Christ gave Himself to “redeem us from ALL iniquity” (Tit 2:14). Therefore “by Him [Christ] all that believe are justified from ALL THINGS, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).

Forgiveness cannot be partial. Either all sin is forgiven or none is forgiven. The nature of sin, together with its repulsiveness to the holy God, will not allow for any remnant of it to remain. Therefore, the redemption that is in Christ Jesus thoroughly removes the presence and guilt of sin. The complete debt incurred by transgression was satisfied by Christ. He did, in fact, “make an end of sins” (Dan 9:24), “put away sin” (Heb 9:26), and take away “the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Everything that God required as a just basis for remission was accomplished by Jesus. That is why forgiveness is total – “all trespasses.” Where sin is not thoroughly remitted, the conscience cannot be cleansed or purged. However, when forgiveness is extensive and absolute, the conscience can be purged “from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb 9:14).

THE POINT

The point of this text is not the forgiveness itself, but what occurred when we were forgiven of “all trespasses.” It was at the point of forgiveness that we were raised with Christ – made one with Him. When we were forgiven, we were “joined to the Lord,” becoming one spirit with Him (1 Cor 6:17). It is then that we were “quickened,” being ushered into the realm of spiritual fulness.

When our sins were remitted, our feet were set in “a large room”(Psa 31:8), filled with all things pertaining to life and godliness. In Christ we were given access to “all things,” being made “complete in Him.” This was true in every genuine conversion, with no exceptions.

Because of grossly deficient teaching, many of us did not become aware of this condition for many years. We stumbled through life focused upon our own miserable inadequacy, blinded to the spiritual abundance that dripped like abundant honey dropping all around us as it did in the “wood” of Jonathan’s day (1 Sam 14:26).

When men seek resources outside of Christ it is only because they do not know they are “complete in Him.” They do not see what has been accomplished in their quickening – when God gave them life even though they were dead in sin. It is the business of the church to declare these things, not allowing believers to live in the ignorance of what is theirs in Christ Jesus. Surely you know in yourself what a handicap it is to be unenlightened concerning these things.

In every sense of the word, we are “complete in Him.” This is not to be questioned or probed with intellectual curiosity, but is to be heartily embraced.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way,

nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 27

THE HANDWRITING OF ORDINANCES BLOTTED OUT

“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross . . . ”

The Spirit continues to confirm our completeness in Christ Jesus – a completeness that was made accessible to us at the very moment we were forgiven “all trespasses.” He now elaborates on the forgiveness of all trespasses, a matter that was not as easily accomplished as some are prone to believe. This verse is a continuation of the thought commenced in verse thirteen. It is not a new thought, but an extension of what has been stated in the previous verse.

\BLOTTING OUT

“Blotting out . . . ” Other versions read, “having wiped out” (NKJV), “having cancelled” (NASB), “erasing the record” (NRSV), “having put an end” (BBE), “having effaced” (DARBY), “by cancelling” 9ESV0, and “obliterating” (NAB)

This begins the explanation of WHY our transgressions were

forgiven. That forgiveness is undergirded by a necessary and impeccably righteous transaction. That is, the forgiveness is based upon the transaction that is now described.

Whatever previously prohibited the forgiveness of “all trespasses” has not been expunged, cancelled, and wiped out. The basis for condemnation no longer exists, and a reason for remission is now provided.

Isaiah used this word in speaking of the coming redemption: “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee” (Isa 44:22). Our text, however, is more precise, as we should expect it to be in the greater light of the Gospel.

THE HANDWRITING OF ORDINANCES

“ . . . the handwriting of ordinances . . . ” Other versions read, “the handwriting of requirements” (NKJV), “the certificate of debt” (NASB), “the written code, with its regulations” (NIV), “the record . . . with its legal demands” (NRSV), “the bond . . . with its legal demands” (RSV), “handwriting of the law” (BBE), “handwriting of the decree” (DOUAY), “the record of debt” (ESV), “the record of our debt to the law” (NJB), and “the record that contained the charges” (NLT).

The book of Ephesians refers to the same work, also choosing very deliberate language to describe it. “Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace” (Eph 2:15).

It is apparent from the translations that men often struggle in their attempt to harmonize Scripture with human opinions of Scripture.

This is the Spirit's explanation for the justness of our forgiveness. Justification is a reality that can stand the test of the strictest scrutiny. In the salvation of sinners, God is not only the "Justifier," but remains "just" as well, being inscrutably righteous in absolving sinners of guilt (Rom 3:26).

HANDWRITING

The word "handwriting" does not merely mean script. In Scripture, the word itself means "a legal document or bond" (STRONG'S). Etymologically, the word signifies "specifically, a note of hand, or writing in which one acknowledges that money has either been deposited with him or lent to him by another, to be returned at an appointed time" (THAYER).

Some have supposed that "the handwriting" refers to the Law itself. However, although the Law is said to have been "written and engraven in stones" (2 Cor 3:7), it is never referred to as handwriting. Neither, indeed, whether in promise or by Apostolic doctrine, is it ever clearly said to have been blotted out, expunged, or rendered null and void.

We might liken this record to "the books" out of which men will be judged (Rev 20:12) – the record of what men have done. It is like the "bill" to which Jesus referred in His parable of the unjust steward. "So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him,

and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore” (Luke 16:6-7). In Christ’s parable, the bill was reduced. In our text, it was “blotted out.”

NOT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Our text does not refer to the Law itself, but to a record of the infractions of the Law. Years after Jesus had been exalted, Paul affirmed that “the work of the Law” was written into Gentile hearts, their conscience “also bearing witness” (Rom 2:15). As well, the Apostle affirmed that by the Law “is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). It also continues along with the Prophets to bear witness of the righteousness that is realized through Christ Jesus (Rom 3:21). The Law also remains “for the lawless” (1 Tim 1:9). It has not, then, been “blotted out.” It has been ended ONLY as the means to righteousness. As it is written, “For Christ is the end of the law FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS to every one that believeth” (Rom 10:4).

This passage has to do with the reason for our forgiveness. Should one choose to believe that the ground for forgiveness is based upon the blotting out of the Law, he is cast upon the horns of a dilemma. How is it that God could be just in blotting out a Law that He Himself has given. It seems to me that for God to be “just and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:26), the presence of the Law is presumed. The Law does not condemn those in Christ because it has been blotted out, but because it CANNOT condemn them. In Christ Jesus the righteous demands of the Law have been satisfactorily and justly met.

ORDINANCES

The ordinances of question are not the Ten Commandments themselves, but the ceremonial ordinances that surrounded them. These were the practical means of fulfilling the Law. They were also the means by which men were measured, and their response to the Law assessed. God did not leave to men to interpret what He meant by the commandments. Rather, He spelled out the meaning inculcating certain procedures into the details of life. They covered all manner of things from eating food to plowing in the fields – from where and when to observe feasts, to how to deal with childbirth and the posting of landmarks.

THE MEANS OF ASSESSMENT

These ordinances were the measure of a persons purported righteousness. A person could not simply say they loved God, or that they were mindful of their neighbor. Profession was not enough.

The Babylonian captivity is an example of punishment incurred for failing to keep the ordinances. The particular ordinance that brought on this captivity was the land Sabbaths. Every seventh year, the land was to rest. For four hundred and ninety years, Judah failed to honor this ordinance. Thus the Lord took all seventy land-sabbaths at one time, during the Babylonian captivity (2 Chron 36:24). That was only one ordinance, and the debt was a single one. Compound that by all of the ordinances, and all of the people, and you have a debt of unspeakable magnitude.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And

ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 28

THE MEANING

The Colossians were being pressured to return to a ceremonial religion – a procedure that could only incur a debt men could not pay (Col 2:16-17). A ceremonial religion was introduced under the Law of Moses. It was based on the Ten Commandments, and constituted the covenant under which Israel functioned. While the Ten Commandments themselves were “the words of the covenant” (Ex 34:26), the covenant itself was “contained in ordinances” (Eph 2:15). These ordinances were bound upon the people, and were the Divinely appointed means of carrying out the commandments written on tables of stone.

These ceremonies were spelled out in the book of Leviticus. For example, a person could not merely say they loved God, it had to be demonstrated in conduct – like not working on the Sabbath day

(Ex 31:15-17), or letting the land lie idle every seventh year (Lev 25:4-9), or observing special feast days (Lev 23). When a leper had been cured, there was a ceremony to be fulfilled (Lev 13-14). Outlined ceremonies were given for a burnt offering (Lev 6:9-13), the grain offering (Lev 6:14-24), the sin offering (Lev 6:25-30), the trespass offering (Lev 7:1:10), etc. There were rules for sewing a garment (Lev 19:10). Details were provided in which clean and unclean foods (Lev 11). There was a procedure associated with giving birth (Lev 12:2-6). There was a particular procedure associated with maintaining the fleshly lineage of the people (Deut 25:5-10). A special procedure was given for being separated exclusively to the Lord (Num 6:2-8). Sowing seeds and plowing fields were governed by procedures (Deut 22:9-10). The highest day of all – the Day of Atonement was governed by detailed procedures (Lev 16).

Any person with a working knowledge of the First Covenant knows its emphasis upon procedures, or ceremonies. This was owing to the fact that the people really did not have a heart for God (Matt 15:8) They did not think like God (Isa 55:8-9). From the beginning they were characterized as being “rebellious against the Lord” (Deut 9:24), being “stiffnecked” (Ex 32:9; 33:5; Deut 9:13). That kind of people can only be governed by Law – detailed laws, for they really have no heart for God.

Because of this circumstance, the First Covenant, although it was laden with procedures, did not change the people. The Law, even though it was holy, just, good, and spiritual (Rom 7:12,14) could not change the people from being hard-hearted to a people with tender hearts. It could not make a basically disobedient people obedient. Instead, it actually brought condemnation to the people, informing them that they were unqualified for Divine acceptance. That is precisely why the First, or Old Covenant is called “the

ministration of death” (2 Cor 3:7), and “the ministration of condemnation” (2 Cor 3:9). This is why it is written, “the Law made nothing perfect” (Heb 7:19). This is all in spite of the fact that the Law provided a staggering number of details by which it was to be carried out.

This is why the apostles vigorously taught the people not to live by procedures – such as relying upon circumcision or other procedures given under the Law. If a person chooses to live by Law, as opposed to living by faith, there can be no mercy, for Law excludes mercy (Heb 10:28). Furthermore, it is not based upon faith (Gal 3:12). Therefore, things that are received by faith cannot be obtained by means of Law. There is no procedure that can of itself sanctify an unholy person. For example, if a person has been living for self, gratifying their own desires and ignoring the demands of a thrice holy God, a vigorous praise service cannot suddenly make the person acceptable. If praise does not come from a truly thankful and perceptive heart, it is really nothing more than noise, and God will not receive it. In fact, as confirmed in Israel, He is repulsed by their attempted worship (Amos 5:21-23) – not because they did not do it correctly, but because they themselves were unholy.

Paul boldly announces that the forgiveness of their sins was based upon the obliteration of a debt-based religion. Empty ceremony and lifeless routine have no place in the newness of life.

WE ARE THE ONES WHO DIED

Rather than the Law itself being removed, or blotted out, we died with Christ, and the law has no power over the dead. This is marvelously declared in Scripture. “Wherefore, my brethren, ye

also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom 7:4).

This death was accomplished in our baptism. We were “baptized into His death” (Rom 6:3), “buried with Him by baptism into death” (Rom 6:4), and “planted together in the likeness of His death” (Rom 6:5). Now we are “dead with Christ” (Rom 6:8; Col 2:20; 2 Tim 2:11). That death has moved us beyond the reach of the condemning Law, and thus the debt for breaking it has been cancelled.

Any person who imagines that this is a license to sin has only betrayed their alienation from God. The person who has been freed from sin has committed an exceedingly great trespass in going back to it.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in

it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 29

AGAINST US AND CONTRARY TO US

“ . . . that was against us, which was contrary to us . . . ” Other versions read, “against us, and which was hostile to us” (NASB), “against us, and that stood opposed to us” (NIV), and “stood against us with its legal demands” (NRSV).

This refers to the ordinances that enforced the Law of God itself. They were “against us” and “contrary to us” in that they contradicted fallen human nature. They required what men were not willing to give, pressing them to live consciously unto God rather than for self. All of them were built upon this fundamental reality: “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart” (Deut 6:5-6). “This was the first and great commandment” (Matt 11:38), even though it was not in the decalogue. It was rather like a summation, of which the other commandments were the details. However, if this love did not exist, the commandments became the judges of the people rather than mere requirements. Because God had created the people, they were responsible to God, and were obligated to love Him. Furthermore, the love of God is the fountain from which obedience flows.

When it came to the Living God, the Israelites were not lovers of Him. They are vividly described as “stiffnecked” (Ex 32:9), “disobedient” (Neh 9:26), and “gainsaying” (Rom 10:21). Their

thoughts and ways were not the thoughts and ways of God (Isa 55:8-9). In their manners and responses they “provoked” the God of heaven to jealousy (Deut 32:16), “provoked Him to anger” (Psa 78:88), and so moved Him that He “abhorred His own inheritance” (Psa 106:40).

Because the people did not love God with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength, the requirements of the Law proved to be a thorn in their sides. Under the administration of that law the people became noted for being rebellious. They were rebellious toward God (Deut 9:7). As it is written, “ye have been rebellious against the Lord” (Deut 9:7), “a stubborn and rebellious generation” (Psa 78:8), and “this is a rebellious people” (Isa 30:9). The Lord Himself testified, “All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom 10:21).

WHY IS THIS THE CASE?

The novice might question why this is so. Why does a holy law incite unholy actions among men? Paul bore witness to this condition when speaking of his former life. “But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead” (Rom 7:8). In fact, he said “the strength of sin is the law” (1 Cor 15:56).

Before Christ, men did not have a new nature. They were not regenerated, and the Holy Spirit had not yet been given to them (John 7:38-39). They had no capacity to live consistently before the Lord, or to rid themselves of a single sin. The Law did not overlook that condition, but pressed upon them the holy demands of God. It addressed the flesh, demanding that it render rigorous and consistent service to God, requiring men to invariably consider

God first, and their neighbors second. Self had to be in the background!

The whole arrangement was “against us” and “contrary to us,” even though the demands were right. The result was that sin was stirred up the more, and our debt became even more massive. Unless the nature of man can be changed, there really is no hope of him being saved!

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 30

TOOK IT OUT OF THE WAY

“ . . . and took it out of the way.” Other versions read, “has

taken it out of the way” (NKJV), “took it away” (NIV), and “set this aside” (NRSV).

It was not the Law that was taken out of the way, for it was not in the way. Sin stood in the way, not Divine law. To be more precise, the guilt of sin stood in the way, or the record of our transgressions – the putting down of the occasions when we failed to carry out the specified details of the Law. That record, which amounted to a massive unpaid bill, is what was taken out of the way. This freed God to justly remit the sins of humanity, and righteously receive them unto Himself. Allow me to once again emphasize that this was accomplished by our death with Jesus. Debts are NOT required of dead people, and thus when they die, the debt is liquidated.

NAILING IT TO HIS CROSS

“ . . . nailing it to His cross . . . ” Actually, it was Jesus Himself who was “nailed” to the cross (John 20:25). To be more precise, it was His body that was nailed to “His cross.” Yet, in His body, the Lord Himself “bare our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24). There is a sense in which His body was like a bill of indebtedness. Whatever happened to His body occurred also to the bill of indebtedness we owed to the Living God. Sins would be forgiven because the debt for them was justly paid. The debt being removed, the sins were “washed away” (Acts 22:17), “blotted out” (Isa 44:22), and taken away (1 John 3:5).

ISAIAH’S PROPHECY

Isaiah painted a most vivid picture of what occurred on the cross – Christ’s cross. “And I will fasten Him as a nail in a sure place; and

He shall be for a glorious throne to His father's house. And they shall hang upon Him all the glory of His father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons. In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall the nail that is fastened in the sure place be removed, and be cut down, and fall; and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off: for the LORD hath spoken it" (Isa 22:23-25).

The "burden" that was upon the "Nail" was the "iniquity of us all." When that "burden" was "cut off" the "handwriting" that was against us was "blotted out." We were "redeemed," and the debt was fully paid. Because we died with Christ, the Law had no more demands over us. Thus it is written that we "are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom 7:4). And again, "For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God" (Gal 2:19). It is not the Law that became dead, but we, who were once subject to its condemnation. Now, because of Jesus, and because of Him alone, the debt is paid, and thus the sins have been removed, together with all traces of guilt. That is, because of our identity with Christ, the record of our past was expunged – blotted out. Now the Law cannot condemn us because of two incontestable facts. First, we have become "dead to the Law through the body of Christ." Second, there is no longer a record of our sins!

Thus it is again affirmed with great power, "Ye are complete in Him." Every need and spiritual desire is fully met in Him.

There is not need for any person in Christ to live with a bludgeoning conscience. Solemnly we are reminded, "'How much

more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb 9:14). That word is offered to those who are in Christ. You can have this purged conscience. It was obtained when you were baptized into Christ (1 Pet 3:21). Yet, due to the subtle attacks of the wicked one, and succumbing to his wiles, the conscience can become defiled again. That is not the time to go to men for help. It is a time to go to God through Christ, confess your sins, and have your conscience purged. Until that takes place, you will not be able to serve God, no matter how strongly you desire to do so.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 31

PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS SPOILED

“And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”

Having settled the issue of personal deficiency – our sin – the Spirit now draws our attention to the hostile forces that are aligned against us. Is this condition addressed by the Lord Jesus? Are we “complete in Him” in this matter?

SPOILED PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS

“And having spoiled principalities and powers . . . ” Other versions read, “having disarmed principalities and powers” (NKJV), “when He had disarmed rulers and authorities” (NASB), “despoiled the principalities and the powers,” ASV “Having made Himself free from the rule of authorities and powers,” BBE and “He has stripped the sovereignties and the ruling forces” (NJB).

The Power of Darkness

On the eve of Christ’s betrayal, the forces of darkness gathered against Him. Of that occasion Jesus Himself said, “this is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53). It was the time when “darkness reigns” (NIV) – “the authority of dark power” (BBE). Methinks the legions of hell converged on Jerusalem, determined to rid themselves once and for all of the restraining power of Jesus.

That night the “power of darkness” was able to do things they could not do before. Jesus was betrayed, bound, led away captive, and tried. He was mocked, beaten, nailed to a tree, and hoisted

between heaven and earth. For the first time He was derided, spit upon, and mocked. No demon pled for consideration that night, as they did when Jesus strode upon the shores of the “country of the Gadarenes” (Mk 5:1-13). Satan did not leave the Son of God as He did after the wilderness temptation (Matt 4:11). Jesus did not expel demons with “the finger of God” that night (Lk 11:20).

It was an hour given to the diabolical forces of darkness, and they exploited it to the fullest extent allowed.

However, in Christ’s death a great victory was wrought over these wicked powers. He dealt a devastating blow to them in His weakest moment, for He was “crucified through weakness” (2 Cor 13:4). Our text states that He “spoiled principalities and powers.” These forces were to him like the Philistines were to Samson (Judges 16:9,12,14). They were like the Syrian armies that surrounded Elisha in Dothan (2 Kgs 6:15).

But Jesus shook them all off in His death as Eleazar repulsed the Philistines singlehandedly (2 Sam 23:9-10), and Shammah fought off the Philistines in an open field (2 Sam 23:11-12). Rather than bringing Him down in triumph, He brought them down, entering triumphantly into “paradise” with a trophy snatched from the fire (Lk 23:43; Zech 3:2).

In Christ’s death He “destroyed the devil” (Heb 2:14), rendering him impotent in the heavenly realms – realms in which those in Christ have been set by a Sovereign God (Eph 2:6). That destruction applied to all of the personalities aligned with the devil, as well as the old serpent himself.

MADE A SHOW OF THEM OPENLY

“ . . . He made a show of them openly, . . . ” Other versions read, “made a public spectacle of them” (NKJV), “made a public display of them” (NASB), “made a public example of them” (NRSV), “He put them openly to shame” (BBE), and “paraded them publically by His victory” (NJB).

In the book of Ephesians this is described as Jesus leading “captivity captive,” or leading “captive a host of captives” (Eph 4:8, NASB).

In what sense was this open and public? It certainly did not appear this way to men. The openness, however, was not to men in the world, but to the heavenly hosts – an enumerable company of angels, and no doubt the “spirits of just men made perfect” as well (Heb 12:23).

EXPRESSED IN THE PSALMS

This glorious triumph was prophesied in the twenty-fourth Psalm. Behold the jubilant entourage as it approaches the gates glory. “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle” (Psa 24:7-8). This was Jesus returning from His triumphant mission.

EXPRESSED IN THE REVELATION

What praise must have been sounded in the glory during this occasion! There is a depiction of it in Revelation. There the picture is of Satan and his angels being cast out of heaven. As soon as that triumph took place John heard “a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night” (Rev 12:10). Principalities and powers had been “spoiled.”

Now this victory is declared in the Gospel, and faith is given to behold its openness and apparentness. This is a victory that is evident to faith, which is fully capable of obtaining the glorious benefits coming from it.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Col 2:9-15)

TRIUMPHING OVER THEM

“ . . . triumphing over them in it.” Other versions read, “triumphing over them by the cross” (NIV), “triumphed over them in the same cross” (GENEVA), and “[God] disarmed the principalities and powers that were ranged against us and made a bold display *and* public example of them, in triumphing over them in Him *and* in it [the cross] (AMPLIFIED). While some versions represent God Himself being the One who triumphed over principalities and powers in Christ, I prefer the standard reading that affirms it was Christ who overcame these foes. These had not gathered together against God directly, but against His Christ. God Himself was not the One who laid down His life, but the Son, who was given that mandate by God (John 10:17-18). The previous evening, the powers of darkness were loosed against Christ Jesus the Sin-bearer (Lk 22:53).

The means of triumph was the cross – “HIS cross” (Col 1:20; 2:14). The sign of ignominy, shame, and the curse (Gal 3:13) became the sign of unparalleled glory and triumph. According to appearance, the cross was the defeat of Jesus Himself – at least that is what His enemies thought, and even His disciples. When Peter followed the arrested Jesus to the palace of the high priest Caiaphas, it is written that he “sat with the servants, to see the end” (Lk 26:58). Three days following, a record is given of two men walking to Emmaus from Jerusalem, where they had been gathered with the disciples of Jesus. They were lamenting because they thought the life of Jesus was ended, and He was not really the One for whom they had been waiting. When joined by the resurrected Jesus Himself, and not recognizing Him, Cleopas had said, “But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.” (Lk 24:21). At that point there was not a man on earth that recognized a triumph

or victory in the cross of Christ.

Now, however, Paul boldly announces that what seemed to occur on the cross was overshadowed by an unseen, yet effective, triumph. While it appeared as though the inimical Jews had finally rid themselves of the convicting presence of Jesus, the wicked unseen forces that were working through them had actually suffered a humiliating defeat! And it was done before an assembled heavenly host! At the time He was dying, Jesus actually snatched a brand from the burning right under the devil's nose, so to speak. It was a thief who was dying at his side in like manner. After that thief had repented, and asked Jesus to remember Him when He came into His Kingdom, Jesus boldly announced, "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). I realize that some teach this was a prophecy of another time, but I care nothing for that nonsense. It does not seem to me that the triumph over the powers of darkness did not issue forth in some results at that time. That very day, when He died, Jesus escorted a former thief into a region that cannot be accessed by the will of man. No wicked principality or power could stop the escort, for there had been a signal defeat of them that was most apparent to the unseen world.

Now those in Christ "glory" in the cross (Gal 6:14). The preaching of this cross is described as "the power of God" to us who are being saved (1 Cor 1:18). It marks the point where the accuser of the brethren was cast down, and all of his principalities and powers plundered and led away in shame and disgrace. If Jesus "destroyed" the devil "through His "death" (Heb 2:14), you may be sure that none of the spiritual forces He had marshaled were unaffected by His atoning death.

In Christ all of our foes become inferior, for they have all been defeated and plundered by Him! What is more, this was done through “the cross,” which was Christ’s lowest and weakest point, for He was “crucified through weakness” (2 Cor 13:4). Reasoning on this wise, the Spirit says, “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom 5:10).

If so much was accomplished by Christ’s death, how much more is being accomplished by His kingly and intercessory life? If principalities and powers were plundered in His cross, what power can they have against us now that He is enthroned in glory?

Incidentally, it must not be forgotten that this entire passage is a commentary on our baptism into Christ, and the benefits that accrued from it.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in

it.” (Col 2:9-15)

Chapter 33

CONCLUSION

Thus the Spirit has powerfully confirmed the thorough adequacy of the Lord’s Christ. We are, in every sense of the word, “COMPLETE IN HIM.” In His Person dwells “the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” Nothing is lacking. No Divine quality required by men is not fully accessible in Him. Further, because of His identity with us as “the Man Christ Jesus,” all of these resources are made accessible to us – they can be possessed! We are complete in Him.

We are “complete in Him,” for He is the Sovereign Head over “all principality and power.” All of the holy angels are under Him, dispatched to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation (Heb 1:6,13-14; Rev 5:11). We are complete in Him. All of the unholy angels are subordinate to Him, being held in check by Him, and strictly controlled by Him (1 Pet 3:22). We are complete in Him. All that God has promised is found in Him (2 Cor 1:20). We are complete in Him. All of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him (Col 2:3). We are complete in Him. We are “made accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6). We are complete in Him. There is “no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). We are complete in Him. No adversarial power is able to separate us from the love of God which is “in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39). We are complete in Him. We are sanctified, or set apart unto God, in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 1:2). We are complete in Him. God has “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3). We are complete in Him.

In our union with Christ, we realize a sufficiency that cannot be controverted. He circumcised our hearts (Col 2:11-12), separating from our essential natures the corruption of the flesh, rendering us sensitive to the Lord. He made our hearts a suitable place for the law to be written (Heb 8:10; 10:16), and for the Holy Spirit to dwell as well (Gal 4:6). When we were baptized, we were “buried with Him,” becoming participants in the merits and benefits of His death. In Him (Rom 6:3-4), God raised us from death in trespasses and sins, to sit with Him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:1-6), having forgiven us “all trespasses” (Col 2:13). We are complete in Him!

Through His vicarious death what we needed was supplied. The record of massive debt that was charged against us was taken out of the way when we died with Him. It was blotted out, so that the Law could no longer condemn us. It became right for God to forgive us and write our names in the Lamb’s book of life (Rom 3:26). In His death the Lord plundered principalities and powers, rendering them impotent in the heavenly places where God has seated us. We are complete in Him.

It is now the ultimate absurdity to turn to the weak and beggardly elements of this world for any kind of assistance Godward. We are to embrace the completeness that is found alone in Christ alone! There is no required sufficiency that is found in mankind – whether psychiatry, religious creeds, theological positions, methods and techniques, or sectarian identity. God has deposited His fulness in Christ, and no aspect of it can be found elsewhere.

I realize that if this circumstance was honored, it would put a lot of men and religious institutions out of business. Speaking for myself,

I am quite willing to live with such an outcome.