

Complete In Christ – Part 2

Colossians 2:11-15

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I want you to follow with me in Colossians 2:11-15.

Paul says, “In Whom...”—referring to “Christ”—“...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.”

Paul has made it clear that all Christians are complete because of their position in Christ. In chapter 2, verse 10 it says, “And ye are complete in Him...”—that’s “Jesus Christ”—“...which is the head of all principality and power.” I pointed out last time that that word “complete” is a nautical term meaning “shipshape,” “fully rigged” and “ready to sail.” The moment you become a Christian, you are born again. The moment God gives you that new life, you are put into Christ. The Bible says that there is “no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”

When you get saved, a whole myriad of things happen to you. I think one of the tragedies of the Christian life is that very few Christians understand what actually happened to them the moment they were saved. They think they reached out by faith and accepted a gift of eternal life, but they don’t stop to think that God actually did something to them or something in them. In them, life was changed for all eternity. There are a lot of blessings that are ours because of our position in Christ. We’re not complete because of what we do; we’re complete because of Who He is and our position and our identification with Christ. A very, very important New Testament doctrine is the believer’s identification with Christ. You might even want to write that down: “I am identified with Christ” or “I am in Christ.”

Notice the phrase in verse 11: “In Whom.” Then in verse 12, “with Him,” and then again in verse 13, “together with Him.” All throughout this passage you are going to find that little phrase repeated: “with Him,” “by Whom,” “in Him.” So it’s all about us and Christ in our identification with Him.

Knowing, believing and acting on your position in Christ and your identification with Christ in His death, burial and Resurrection is the basis for victorious, Christian living. You must know who you are in Christ. You must believe by faith who you are in Christ, and then you must yield in obedience to what you are in Christ to live the victorious, Christian life.

Now in our text, Paul explains a threefold identification with Christ. The first is that in Christ, we are dead and buried. Now I know that may not sound too exciting to you; “Oh great. I’m dead

and I'm buried. Wonderful. I'm glad I came today." But hold on for just a minute so you can understand the theological and doctrinal implications of what that means.

Let me point out to you in the text, verse 11, and the first part of verse 12 that Paul says, "In Whom..."—that's "Jesus Christ"—"...also ye are circumcised with the circumcision..."—and catch this phrase—"...made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with Him in baptism." Again, "In Whom also ye are." So this is clearly teaching that you, as a believer, are in Christ and that you have "all the blessing of the Spirit in heavenly places in Christ."

Now here's the question: What are we blessed with in Christ? The answer is, verse 11, you have been circumcised in Christ. You go, "This also really blesses me. Thank you very much, Pastor Miller. I came to find out I'm dead, buried and circumcised. That's just a really wonderful thought. I'm so glad I came today."

What Paul had in mind by this phrase is that circumcision was a rite that God gave to Abraham as a mark of the Covenant that He made with him and the promises that He made. But it actually became a symbol of a spiritual reality. That's what's being implied here. It's not talking about the Jewish rite of circumcision; it's talking about, verse 11, that which is "made without hands." He's talking about spiritual circumcision.

Even in the Old Testament, the prophets spoke of the circumcision of the heart before God. Stephen, in Acts 7, when he was preaching to the Pharisees, Sadducees and the Jews who were listening to him, said, "You are uncircumcised in your heart and in your ears." What did he mean by that? He meant that their hearts were sinful and wicked and bent against God.

Here's the application: For the Christian, it signifies death to the sinful nature and the putting off of the old, sinful, Adamic nature. It opens up a whole concept taught in the Bible that when you were first born, you inherited a sin nature. The word "nature" may not be the best word to describe it. It's kind of a sin principle, or sometimes we call it the "Adamic nature," because it's that which we inherited from Adam. If you're a parent and you raise children, I don't need to convince you that your little ones were born with a sinful nature.

"Not my child."

"Yes, your child." Even when they are in diapers they say, "No!" What's one of their favorite words they first say? "No!" They have that down pat. Almost before they say, "Daddy" or "Mommy" it's "No!" They know that word. David said in the Psalms, "I went forth from my mother's womb speaking lies."

Did you ever notice that you don't have to train children in the art of lying? "If you ever get in the cookie jar, make sure you wipe off the crumbs. Mom told you not to, but make sure there are no crumbs on your face. Smile real nice and say, 'No, Mommy. I didn't eat the cookies.' It's called 'lying,' and it'll help you out of a tight spot." You don't have to do that, because it comes naturally.

“Who taught him that?” It came from Adam. It’s a sinful bent. That’s why we have to be born again, and when we are born again, we get a new nature, a new love for God, a new capacity to do what is righteous before God.

What happens to that sinful nature? It actually is rendered inoperative. It’s put out of business. We’ll discuss that more later.

So to be circumcised here is a reference to your spiritual birth in which Christ cuts off that old sinful nature and the dictates of the flesh that we inherit from Adam. Notice in verse 11 it’s called the “putting off the body of the sins of the flesh.” Now, again, it’s a challenging phrase to interpret, but possibly what Paul is saying there is that the whole, entirety of your sinful behavior, your sinful lifestyle, is to be “circumcised,” figuratively speaking—cut off and done away with. You’re to give up that old, sinful lifestyle.

Notice in verse 11 that it is to be done by Christ. It says, “by the circumcision of Christ.” What does that phrase mean? It means that Christ does that for you. He is the One Who circumcises your heart; He cuts away your sinful desires. When does it happen? It happens at the moment of conversion. Actually, in verse 11 where it says, “in Whom also you are circumcised,” in the Greek it is what’s called the “eres” tense. You say, “Well, what does that mean?” It means it happened in the past with an effect on you into the future. So it was a one-time past experience. It happened at conversion.

I cannot emphasize that enough. It wasn’t because you prayed a whole lot or you went to church five times a week or you fasted or you sought the Lord, and then God did that work on you so that now you’re in the “deeper-life club.” What I’m saying right now is very important for you to grasp. It happened to you the moment you were saved. Everything we talk about in these verses is true of all Christians, regardless of their walk with the Lord. The moment you were born again, the moment you were regenerated, you were taken out of Adam and placed in Christ. A spiritual circumcision took place; the old nature was katarge δ or rendered inoperative, and God gave you a new nature. That’s why after you got saved, you said, “Wow! I really like going to church now. I really like reading the Bible. This is weird! I actually like being around Christians.”

I grew up in church, but I didn’t get saved until I was 19 years old, and then all of a sudden I went back to church and said, “Wow! This is awesome!” I realized that God did a work in my heart. I’m reading my Bible and praying. I’m talking to God, and I sense His presence. What happened to me is that God circumcised my heart; He cut away the old life and gave me a new life in Christ.

You ask, “What do you mean that we’re ‘dead’ and ‘buried’?” The idea is explained in Romans 6:3-4. It says there, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore, we are buried with Him by baptism into death.” Notice our text for just a moment in verse 12: “Buried with Him in baptism.”

You say, "Wow! This is weird. We're talking about circumcision and now we're talking about baptism." Just as circumcision had a spiritual reality behind it, baptism, for the Christian, also has a spiritual reality behind it. It's not being dunked in water; it's being baptized by the Holy Spirit into Jesus Christ. And the moment you were saved, as a Christian, you were baptized by the Holy Spirit. That means that the work of the Spirit took you out of Adam and identified you or placed you into Jesus Christ.

So our old nature—see Romans 6:6—was put out of business. That word in the Greek is "katargeō" which means "to render inoperative." It doesn't mean that it's annihilated. That means that as Christians, we still have the capacity to sin. We can yield to God or we can yield to our old nature. But our old nature has been rendered inoperative, and we have the capacity now to be able to do that which is pleasing to God. So in Christ, all Christians have been both circumcised and baptized. It happened the moment that you were saved.

You go, "Okay. This is just your first point, and you kind of lost me already. So what does that mean?" Well, the same doctrine is taught in Romans 6. Paul tells us three things—to put it in "shoe leather." First of all, we need to know—knowledge. "Know ye not," he says. The second thing we need to do is reckon. That's a King James word for believe. It's a step of faith. And then the third step is to yield. You yield your instruments, or your body, to righteousness. That's how we "walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

I use the illustration quite often of a vacuum cleaner. Or you can use any power tool that you have to plug in the wall as illustration. You plug in the vacuum cleaner in the wall socket, hit the "on" button, it roars to life and you vacuum your floors. You're vacuuming, you get a little way down the hall and the cord pulls out of the wall socket. What happens to the vacuum? It dies. So you have to take the cord, plug it back in and it roars back to life.

The vacuum is kind of a picture of your old, sinful nature. The moment you were saved, God unplugged it. But what happens is that we plug it back in. And when we plug it back in, we yield to our old life. We yield to our old nature, and it roars back to life. So we need to yield to God and not yield to the flesh. Don't plug that old, sinful nature back in. It's been rendered inoperative. It's been put out of business, so that we can walk in the Spirit.

Here's the second blessing we have in our identification with Christ. In Christ, we are risen and living. I don't want to leave you in the grave dead. I want to take the next step in the text, and it says that in Christ, we are "risen" and living. At the end of verse 12, Paul says, "...wherein also ye are..."—Notice that "ye are." This is what you are as a Christian—"...risen with Him..."—I am risen with Christ. How?—"...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..."—or "made alive"—"...together with Him."

Now notice in verse 12, "...ye are risen with Him." So we have died with Christ when Jesus died on the Cross; God sees us as dying with Him unto sin and unto the Law. We were buried with Christ—our identification with Him—and up from the grave He arose. You believe in the

Resurrection of Jesus Christ? When Jesus rose, we rose; what is true of Jesus is true of us. Baptism pictures death and resurrection. You are risen with Him.

This is why I believe in total immersion. When you are baptized, the baptism doesn't save anyone; it's just a symbol of what actually happens by the work of the Holy Spirit. Just as there is a circumcision without hands, the baptism is of the Spirit; it is not of water. By the way, in Romans 6 where it talks about being baptized in Christ, there is no water there; it is the work of the Holy Spirit. When we baptize people, we actually put them under water.

I'm always kind of chuckling when I baptize people, because they say, "Hey. You sure you won't lose me? You won't let go? You'll bring me up, won't you? You haven't lost anybody?"

"No, you'll be safe."

I thought, What if we baptize people by throwing them off the pier? "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost," [as he is throwing the person in the ocean]. "Make it back. You're saved. If you don't make it back, you weren't really a Christian." I'm kidding. I thought it would be cool to baptize with a super sprayer. "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, [as he is spraying them].

But when we baptize, we "bury" you under water. That's a beautiful picture. Your old life and all its sin and all its past has been buried. Think about that today: everything you were before Christ has been buried. And when you come out of the water, it's a picture of the new, resurrected life that you have in Jesus Christ. That's what Paul is conveying here; that we are risen with Him.

How were we resurrected? Notice verse 12: "...through the faith of the operation of God..." From the word "operation," we get our word "energy." It's the work of God. It's the energy or operation of God. You can't resurrect yourself. You can't give yourself new life. It happened the moment you were born again. Every Christian, the moment they believed and trusted in Jesus Christ, was crucified, buried and resurrected.

Notice verse 13 makes it clear that we needed to be resurrected. Paul says, "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened..."—or "made alive"—"...together with Him." So we needed resurrection. In Ephesians 2:5, Paul says, "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us..."—or "made alive"—"...together with Christ (by grace ye are saved)."

Now here is what you need to get: You died with Jesus on the Cross. You were buried in the grave, but you came out of the grave, and now you have new life. Isn't that an awesome thought? Your identification with Christ means that you are dead to the old life and that you are risen to walk in newness of life.

Let me give you blessing in Christ number three. In Christ, we are forgiven and free. These are kind of hallelujah, praise the Lord, shouting verses. Notice them in the end of verse 13 to verse

15: "...having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us..."—that was the Law, which brought condemnation. We couldn't keep it because of the weakness of our flesh—"...and took it out of the way, nailing it to His Cross..."—Praise God!—"...And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." Man, this is amazing!

So the moment I was saved, I died, I was buried, I was resurrected and I walk now in newness of life. But we also know that I've been completely forgiven of all of my sins, and I am free now to live the life that is pleasing unto God. There is no spiritual life without forgiveness of sin. You can't sit in a lotus position, contemplate your navel and become spiritual.

We hear a lot of talk in the world today about "spirituality." There is no "spirituality" apart from forgiveness of sins. Our sins separate us from God. It's interesting that even some of the major religions in the world don't even believe in sin. If you don't believe in sin, then what are you going to do about sin? They just deny that it exists. Denying that something exists means you're not facing reality. Sin does exist. And only God can forgive your sins.

In Christianity, Jesus came to deal with the sin issue; that we might be forgiven of all sin so that we could come back into a right relationship with God and have spiritual life in Christ. There is no spiritual life without the forgiveness of sins. And when you become a Christian, God forgives all your sins.

When the Devil comes and asks, "How can you go to church? You're really not a very good person. Those people at Revival are spiritual, but you're not. They're really good people, but you're not. You're a wretched, miserable, wicked sinner. You can't go to church and sing with those people and worship with those people." And sometimes we say, "Yeah. Amen, Devil. I'll stay home today." Don't listen to the Devil. It says in verse 15 that He "spoiled principalities and powers." He conquered over them. There is victory in Jesus Christ. But remember this: All of your sins are forgiven.

Let me give you five facts about forgiveness. Number one, God's forgiveness is complete. When you become a Christian, God forgives all your sins. Verse 13 says, "...having forgiven you all trespasses." What is a trespass? A trespass indicates sin that is willful and deliberate. There is a word for sin that means you didn't intend to do it, but you fell short; you tried, but you fell short. But this word for sin that is translated "trespasses" means that you willingly, deliberately, knowingly sinned; you knew God's Law and you knew God's standard, but you stepped over the line. It literally means to step over the line or to transgress.

You knew that God said in His Word, "Thou shall not lie." What did you do? You lied. God says, "Thou shall not steal." What did you do? You stole. God says, "Thou shall not covet." What did you do? You coveted. God's Word says, "Thou shall not commit adultery," and you committed adultery. God's Word says, "Thou shall have no other gods before Me," and you have all these other gods that are first in your life. Maybe it's your pride. Maybe it's your unforgiveness. Maybe it's some other attitude-sin in your flesh. But we knew God's Word and

we transgressed; we stepped over the line. Yet even all that, God has forgiven.

It was amazing for me the day I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my heart, and He forgave all my sins. I felt a weight lifted off my shoulders. I literally felt clean inside. That initial experience of knowing all my sins were forgiven caused great joy to flood my soul. God's forgiveness is complete.

Secondly, God's forgiveness is gracious. That means He forgives us based on His grace and not based upon our performance. In Romans 3:24, it says, "Being justified freely by His grace...." To be justified means to be declared righteous. God justifies you by His grace—His unearned, His undeserved favor.

Thirdly, God's forgiveness is certain. Why? Because it's based on the promises of God. God says He forgives my sins, so I believe it; that settles it. God cannot lie. I can lie and you can lie, but God cannot lie. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Either it's true or it's not true. What God says can either be believed or not believed. When Satan comes and says to you, "You're not really saved. You're not going to heaven. You're not really a Christian," just remember that God, Who cannot lie, has spoken in His Word. I know my sins are forgiven because the Word of God promised it, the Son of God purchased it and the Spirit of God brought it to me. He witnessed to my heart. The Bible says that we can know that we pass from death to life; we can have assurance.

I believe the Bible teaches that if you are a Christian, you should know that you are saved. It's a bummer to have things when you don't know you have them. You guys ever been working on a project in the garage, and you need a tool? I'm not a tool guy. I have a couple of funky screwdrivers and a pair of pliers and one really dorky hammer. I'm really not into tools, so I borrow them from my neighbor and break them and give them back. I'm that scroungy dude in the neighborhood. So you go to the store and buy this tool and bring it home and do your project. When you put it away, you realize you already had that tool. Now you have two of them. Then give it to your neighbor. Give him back the tool you broke.

Or maybe you have some money stashed somewhere. Sometimes I'll throw cash in a sock drawer, and I'll forget it's there. "I need some money. I don't have any money." Then I'll find it years later. "Wow! I have \$100 in my sock drawer! It's awesome! I wish I knew that last week when I needed money."

When you don't know you have something, it doesn't do you any good. So we need to know, we need to believe and we need to yield. We need to put it into "shoe leather" and put it into practice in our daily lives.

The fourth fact about forgiveness is that God's forgiveness is motivating. What does that mean? It means that if God has forgiven you, you will forgive others. You show me someone who is unwilling to forgive other people who have sinned against them, and I'll show you

somebody who needs to be forgiven by God. Something's wrong with their heart. In Ephesians 4:32 it says, "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

If you've been married for any number of years, you've learned to forgive. Isn't that right, married couples? That's the way to stay married; be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving one another, even as God has forgiven you. You learn to forgive and then to move on.

Remember when Peter thought he was really hot stuff and he asked, "Lord, how many times should my brother sin against me and I forgive him?" Then he threw out a number. "Seven?" He thought he was pretty awesome. "Seven times, Lord, someone sins against me, and seven times I'm going to forgive them." What are you going to do on number eight? You're out? Can you imagine that in a marriage? "Honey, I've forgiven you seven times; you better not screw up. You've used up your quota." That's crazy. How long could you stay married?

Jesus said, "No, Peter. Not seven times. Seventy times seven." And I'm sure Peter went, "Ay, yai, yai, yai, yai." If you just learn to forgive, you get in the habit. There are good habits, and one of the best habits you can learn is to forgive people. If you're struggling with someone who has hurt you or offended you or wronged you, and you're living with that bitterness, you're hurting no one but yourself. Let God forgive you of your sin, then you will be enabled to forgive others. You come to the Cross to be forgiven, you stay at the Cross to be forgiving, to learn to forgive others who have sinned against you. So forgiveness is motivating.

Fifthly and lastly, God's forgiveness is liberating. Notice it in verse 14: "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." Forgiveness means that I am free from the laws, debt, penalty, curse and condemnation. In verse 15 I am free from Satan's tyranny over my life.

Notice what Jesus did for us at the Cross. Verse 14 said He "blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us." Secondly, He took it out of the way. Then thirdly, verse 15, He "spoiled" Satan's power. So you could summarize these three things: blotted out, took it out of the way and spoiled.

What did He blot out? The "the handwriting of ordinances that was against us." This was referring to the law of God.

Do this and live, the Law commands

But gives me neither feet nor hands.

I can't keep God's law. I can't be a good-enough person, because of the weakness of my flesh. The Law is good. The Law is just. The Law is holy. The problem is not the Law; the problem is with us. And God dealt with that.

Did you ever notice that when you break a law and you get in trouble for it, you get mad at the law? You get a speeding ticket. "Well, the speed limit's too low. I shouldn't have gotten a ticket. The speed limit should be 95 right by the school. Those kids can get out of the way; they're agile." Don't be stupid.

I solemnly confess to you that I got a speeding ticket a while back. I have repented. Remember He has forgiven all our sins. I was on the way to preach, I was late and I was going a "little fast," and I got pulled over. I thought, Man, that speed limit's too low. That's just crazy. Don't they know guys have to get to their preaching engagements? You know what that's like? It's like getting mad at the mirror because you're ugly. Can you imagine someone saying, "I'm getting a new mirror, man! I am so mad at that mirror! Every time I look in that mirror, I'm ugly."

"Dude, it's not the mirror! You need help. And only God can give it to you." You look at the Law and it's, "Oh, no!" So what do we do? We lower God's standards. We blame the Law, because it reveals our sin. "Oh, God didn't say that. We don't have to do that. That's not for today."

But when Jesus died on the Cross, He took care of the Law, which "was against us," verse 14. Paul graphically describes it as "the handwriting of ordinances that was against us." So He blotted it out. It's like having a debt and a blotter, and He just wipes out the debt. It was against us and contrary to us.

And the second thing He did was He "took it out of the way, nailing it to His Cross." All of our sins were nailed to the Cross, and Jesus paid for them there. Remember when Jesus died, He said, "It is finished"? "Tetelestai" or "paid in full."

Then thirdly, in verse 15, He did three things. He spoiled Satan's power. Then He made a show of Satan, and He triumphed over Satan. The "principalities and powers" are demon spirits or demonic forces. The word "spoiled" means "to divest the enemy of its weapons." Satan had his teeth pulled out at the Cross. He does "walk about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," but he has no teeth. All he can do is gum you, because you're in Christ. You're a child of God. Don't listen to the enemy.

Then He made a show of Satan by triumphing over him in the Resurrection. The words "triumphing over" principalities and powers is a word-picture of what was called the "Roman triumph." When Roman generals would conquer a foreign land, they would have a "triumph parade." The general would ride at the front of the parade in his chariot, and all of his captives would be following behind in chains. This huge parade went down the main street. Sometimes the captives would be chained to the wheels of the chariots; they would become human "hubcaps." And it was a big, celebratory triumph parade. It says that you've conquered over the enemy. In this word-picture, that is what Paul is painting here in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The triumph. The Bible says that "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

R. Kent Hughes says, "Total forgiveness is something to celebrate. It's beyond any positive

thinking, therapy or hypnosis can provide. It is complete; extending to the conscious and unconscious sins of our lives.”

Do you remember the story when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead in John 11? Lazarus was dead; so were we. Jesus showed up and said, “Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead, came forth.” He came out of the grave.

We were dead; now we're alive. We heard His voice. By the grace of God, He opened your heart. He opened your ears and opened your eyes, you trusted Jesus Christ, and He gave you new life. And you came out of your grave. We sing that new song, I Came Outta That Grave.

But the story isn't over. How did Lazarus come out of the grave? Remember? He came out with grave clothes on. The Bible says he was “bound hand and foot with grave clothes.” He was like a mummy coming out of the grave. Jesus then said, “Loose him, and let him go.”

A lot of Christians who were dead have been made alive, but they are still walking around in their grave clothes. Maybe you came to church with the grave clothes of bitterness or unforgiveness or lust or hatred or greed. I don't know what grave clothes you're wearing, but Jesus wants to loose you and let you go. He wants to free you from the old life of bondage. You don't need to be in bondage anymore. You died. You were buried. You rose. Now Jesus wants to say, “Loose them and let them go.” And all those sins you can be free from through the power of the Holy Spirit.