

51-02-01.wpd --Human Emancipation in Christ

Gnosticism, legalism, sin nature, circumcision, baptism, nakedness  
Col 2:6-15

In Christ we are in direct relationship to the *fullness* of God.

### **INTRODUCTION:** (Text read as Scripture reading)

--Whatever we have in this experience called salvation, we have in only one way: by being "in Christ," so Paul tells us, v.6-7, So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

--Colossians contains amazing information about our eternal destiny as humans. We are *body-spirit beings* for a reason, and *Christ became one of us* for exactly that same reason: to *lead us in ruling* over "all things."

When Adam and Eve sinned, the first symptom of "missing the mark" was shame for their wonderful physical bodies God created. [Thomas Merton, in *No Man Is an Island*, says, "This is the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—disgust with the things we have misused and hated of ourselves for misusing them."]. Yet *our nature as spirit-body beings was specifically meant to be the way God would bring together both the spiritual and physical realms* under one governing leadership. In the beginning, Satan used "gnosis" or "knowledge" to get us off track. He is still trying to do that, and this is one of the reasons for the letter to the Colossians.

### **I. A Warning About Two Enemies of Christian Faith, v.6-11**

A. Colossians confronts two religious ideas **Jewish legalism** and **Greek Gnosticism**, which have an opposite focus.

1. *Gnosticism placed an emphasis on the spirit that made our physical body essentially a worthless burden.*
2. *Jewish legalism placed an emphasis on the physical body that overshadowed the importance of our spiritual nature.*

B. These were *dangerous to Christian faith* because *one seemed so spiritually correct* and the *other seemed so religiously correct*, but Paul warns in v.8, See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

1. The *image* here is that of a *foreign army making slaves of a conquered people*. Paul wants to prevent that possibility by *showing us where we stand: HOM.idea.*

2. To avoid captivity by *legalism* and *Gnostic ideas*, we must know *where we stand* and *hold the position* described in v.9-10, For in Christ all the *fullness* of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given *fullness* in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

### **TRANS:** This is a deathblow to both **Gnosticism** and **Jewish legalism!**

It shows our position "*in Christ*" as a **direct relationship to the fullness of God**. [*In Gnosticism*, *human spirits* fell from *divine fullness* by being attached to the material world through our *physical bodies*. The *secret knowledge* of Gnostic teachers was supposed to get us back to "*fullness*" -- Paul tells us we already have this, but only "*in Christ*."]. *Jewish legalism* made "*circumcision*" the *physical action that established relationship with God*. Paul explains how *these two opposite ideas* both meet their defeat "*in Christ*."

### **II. The Meaning of Circumcision** (cutting off the male foreskin)

A. Christian shyness in discussing our genitals is a bad habit left over from the *body taboo* Satan introduced through "knowledge" back in Eden. [*Body shame* is not a Christian virtue. It comes from Gnostic ideas that infiltrated the early church. "We shouldn't talk about those nasty parts of our bodies." RIGHT! There are none! But silence fails our children. Instead of their gaining a godly view of the body, all they get is the *pornographic view* that prevails in modern America.] To reject this *God-dishonoring* distortion I must speak about any and all body parts openly and honestly.

B. *Circumcision was a sign of faith in future salvation* [*God promised Abraham* that his physical offspring would bless the whole world. To symbolize this, God gave an *explicit sign* that connected this promise with procreation. The *glans penis* is naturally hidden by a foreskin, except during erection before intercourse. With the foreskin circumcised, the *glans penis* is perpetually naked. *This sign was commonly visible* in Bible times, because there was *no social shame* in the routine practice of outdoor bathing.] The naked *glans penis* was a constant visible reminder to Jewish people that their hope was connected to sexual intercourse. But when the offspring that brought that hope finally came, God changed the symbol.

**TRANS:** *Secret spiritual knowledge* identified Gnostic faith, but an *openly visible physical sign* identified Jewish faith. Circumcision was a mark of putting off a pagan lifestyle and putting faith in the Lord. In the same way baptism became a new way to mark the Christian believer.

### III. The Meaning of Baptism, v.11-12

- A. Christianity gave new meanings both to circumcision and to baptism. [As a sign of repentance, John the Baptist had used the familiar Jewish *mikveh*, a ritual nude bath required of converts to Judaism. It showed that their uncleanness was washed away, and that they were now as nakedly innocent as Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden.]
- B. After Christ's resurrection, the *mikveh* bath took on new meaning, absorbing the old significance of circumcision— **v.11-12**, *In him [in Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.*
1. The *mikveh* now signified more than repentance or cleansing:
    - a. In *circumcision* the penis was stripped of foreskin. In *baptism* the believer was stripped of clothing. Both were now seen as a stripping off of our old self for putting on a new life in Christ.
    - b. Also, *going into and coming out of the water naked*, identified us with Christ's naked death on the Cross and His resurrection from the grave, so that, as He left the earthly womb of the tomb with His graveclothes left behind, we rise from the water as naked newborns ready for a new life.
  2. (Read v.13-15) Christ's physical body on the Cross shows the emptiness of Gnostic philosophy; His fulfilling the ritual Law of Moses by that Cross shows the emptiness of Jewish legalism.
    - a. Listen to an early church father explaining the *mikveh* bath  
Cyril of Jerusalem: "As soon as you came into the inner part of the baptistry, you put off your clothes, which is an emblem of putting off the old self with its deeds; and being thus stripped, you stood naked, imitating Christ, who was naked on the cross, who by his nakedness spoiled principalities and powers, publicly triumphing over them in the cross."]
    - b. A Reformed theologian, R. J. Rushdoony tried to explain these early concepts surrounding the use of the nude baptism: "Men were born naked; hence, they were reborn naked in baptism. No works of the unregenerate man could be carried into heaven; therefore, the candidate symbolically stripped himself of all clothing to indicate that he had nothing save God's grace.... This practice of naked baptism indicates how seriously the Biblical symbolism was taken by the early church...."

**CONCLUSION:** What we lost through sin, we've regained through Christ. **In Christ we are in direct relationship to the fullness of God.**

Col 2:6-15 (NIV) So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, {7} rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. {8} See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. {9} For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, {10} and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. {11} In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, {12} having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. {13} When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, {14} having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. {15} And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.