



Sermon "Spiritual Fullness in Christ"

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I've been reading an article written by a missiologist, Don Little, who has given his life to help church planting efforts among Muslims in the Middle East. He has over 30 years of experience in helping missionaries make disciples of Jesus. One way in which he helps is to survey the different approaches missionaries make in their attempts to make disciples.

In one story, Don mentions a missionary who experienced quick conversions to Jesus. His ministry was fruitful in that a good number of Muslims professed faith in Jesus. The problem he was experiencing was that those who had professed faith would leave their commitment to follow Jesus if they faced persecution.

In another story, Don mentions that he had seen this trend on the field and so he began speaking with other missionaries to see if their experiences were different. When he asked a group on how many of their converts had left the faith, one missionary said, "None."

Don sat down with this missionary and had found that she had taken more time with Muslims to explain what following Jesus really meant. She talked about Jesus being the Great King over all creation. She talked about Jesus' obedience unto death. She talked about counting the cost before making a commitment to follow Jesus. As a result, none of the believers of Muslim background wavered in their faith even when suffering persecution.

In today's passage, a bit of this woman's approach to making disciples can be seen in Paul as he ministers to the church in Colossae. Paul will warn the church not to be deceived by their cultural traditions or religious practices. Paul will remind the church that they were purchased by God through the life of Jesus. They were made children of God. And Paul will remind them that they owe a debt of love to God. God had forgiven their rebellion of His rule. By doing this, Paul is reminding the church to count the cost of following Jesus.

Last week we saw how Paul experienced joy even while imprisoned. Paul got to experience a deeper knowledge of Jesus through his suffering. Paul was showing the church in Colossae what it meant to follow Jesus into more maturity in him. We pick up today with a reminder to the church not to be distracted by other voices that are calling for their attention.

1.) Don't Be Deceived By Others

Colossians 2:6-8

⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives 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 elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.***

In Colossians 2:6–8, Paul mentions “hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world.” What is Paul referring to? It isn’t clear from the letter and I think this is significant. Rather than unpacking all of the nuances and complexities of these deceptions, Paul takes his time to reinforce the truth! He’s had just previously told them their hope was the glory of Christ within them through faith.

At the beginning of this section, Paul reinforces this saying, “just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” To ensure the church remained disciplined in the truth, Paul focused on the truth and not on elaborating on the lies and deceptions around them!

Still, it may be helpful to gain some appreciation at what these deceptions may have been to help us know if we experience them ourselves today.

In his commentary on the letter of Colossians, F F Bruce states that this phrase, “depends on human tradition” is much like the phrase Jesus uses of the Pharisees in the book of Mark. In that account, the Pharisees are asking Jesus why he allows his disciples to eat without “giving their hands a ceremonial washing” as was the religious custom. Jesus rebukes them by using a quote from the prophet Isaiah who said of rebellious Israel, “These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.” Jesus then says to the Pharisees, “You have let go of the commands of God and are holding onto human traditions.”

It’s possible, then, that Paul is warning the church that meets in Colossae not to follow religious traditions that seem wise but detract them from the truth. It may seem very religious to ceremonially wash your hands before a meal, it may seem very religious to be disciplined and be considered especially astute to how you treat the body, but Paul is saying, “Beware!” He’s telling the church to live out the glory of Christ within them by following, by the power and guidance of the Spirit, only the words Jesus has spoken.

2.) God Made Us His Own

Colossians 2:9–12

⁹ *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,* ¹⁰ *and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. **He is the head over every power and authority.*** ¹¹ *In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. **Your whole self, ruled by the flesh, was put off when you were circumcised by Christ,*** ¹² *having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

In Colossians 2:9–12, Paul reminds them to count the cost of following Jesus. The church is not to follow deceptive philosophies of those who consider themselves religiously disciplined. There is only one authority to follow. Jesus reigns over “every power and authority.” Jesus is not a religious teacher or one of many spiritual guides given to the world. Jesus reigns with his Father as King over Creation.

Paul says that Jesus, who reigns over creation, Paul grafted the church in Colossae into the family of God. Just as circumcision was a sign that one belonged in the nation of Israel, so Jesus had created a new people, a church, his body. The people in the church of Colossae are members of the body of Christ. They are all servants of the Great King.

Paul said this another way in his letter to the church in Ephesus. He said, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.”

In this section of the letter, Paul reminds the church to count the cost by reminding them that Jesus has authority over all and that they all are child-servants of his kingdom.

3.) We Owe God Our Obedience

Colossians 2:13–15

*¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. **He forgave us all our sins,** ¹⁴ **having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness,** which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken 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.*

In Colossians 2:13–15, just as Paul reminded the church in Ephesus that they were adopted through the forgiveness of their sins, Paul here reminds the church in Colossae of the same truth. God “cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness.” This statement would have been easier to understand when Peter first preached the Gospel at Pentecost.

At Pentecost, Peter told his listeners that they were indebted to God. He said that Jesus was accredited to them as God’s Son by the miracles he did, but they with the help of those even more wicked than them, put Jesus to death by nailing him to the cross. For these listeners, they would have known that they were guilty before God. They would have known that they were indebted to God.

Although the members of the church in Colossae weren’t in Jerusalem, nor did they put Jesus to death, the Spirit of God would reveal the truth of their sin debt to God. A psalmist said that he had

tried to ignore and keep silent about his sins, but that the Lord had revealed the weight of his sin to where he could no longer bear it.

In this way, the church in Colossae would know that Paul isn't only speaking in legal terms about their debt to God. The Spirit is using Paul so that the church would know, before God Himself, that they were indebted to Him.

Being created to follow the Creator, being forgiven their sins against God, the only response for the church is submission and obedience. As Paul said to the church in Rome, "I urge you, brothers and sisters, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."

In these three sections, Paul reminds the church to count the cost of following Jesus. They were not to be deceived but to follow Jesus' words alone. Jesus has authority over everything. In response to the debt against God that was paid by Jesus, the church was to offer their lives to obedience to his will.

What is our application for today?

1.) We Follow Jesus

We belong to Jesus. Paul has seen in other churches how easy it was to get this wrong. In Paul's letter to the church in Corinth Paul said of the deceived church, "One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ.'" Paul then says, "I Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptised in the name of Paul?"

If we are to only follow Jesus, then we must open his Word daily to be reminded of his call to us. The words of Jesus are not meant to inspire us as much as lead us. We are to obey what he says even if we think the words are uninspiring. Jesus commanded us to make disciples, to teach others all that he said and did. Even if these words make us cringe in fear, worried about the response of others, these words are coming from our King. He purchased us in order that we might be able to follow him, to obey God.

Let me give an example of obedience. When my Jo was a youth, she attended an Easter camp in Queenstown. A powerful preacher was asked to speak to the parents gathered as the youth were led to other events scheduled for them. But Jo, being Jo, decided that she would go to hear the preacher for herself even if it was planned just for the adults.

The preacher spoke powerfully about what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus. He said that when Jesus calls you, you must give your entire life to him. That wasn't the sign of a special Christian, but a call to all who would follow Jesus. There was a call to come forward if others felt this call. Jo immediately went forward. She remembers looking back and wondering why others weren't also coming forward!

Jesus alone is our Lord. He reigns with his Father as our King. Let us go forward into fuller maturity and join the youthful Jo at the feet of Jesus.