

Sermon July 27, 2025 Colossians 2:6-15; Rooted in Christ, Living for Him

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today we turn to the words of the Apostle Paul in Colossians 2:6-15, a passage that anchors us in the truth of what Christ has done for us and calls us to live as those who are rooted in Him. As Lutheran Christians, we stand firm on the foundation of God's Word, trusting in the sufficiency of Christ's work on the cross and the power of His resurrection. This text not only reveals the depth of Christ's love and victory but also guides us in how we are to live as His redeemed people, united with Him through faith.

The Foundation: What Christ Has Done for Us

Paul begins by urging the Colossians—and us—to “walk in” Christ Jesus, rooted and built up in Him, established in the faith, and abounding in thanksgiving (Col. 2:6-7). But before we consider what it means to walk in Christ, we must first marvel at what Christ has done for us. This passage is a glorious proclamation of the Gospel, the good news that we, as sinners, could never earn or deserve.

In verses 9-10, Paul declares, “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.” Here, we see the heart of our faith: Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. The entire fullness of God dwells in Him, not partially, not symbolically, but truly and completely. This is no mere teacher or prophet; this is God incarnate, the Creator of the universe, who took on human flesh to save us. As Lutherans, we confess this truth in the Nicene Creed: Jesus is “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God.” His divine nature ensures that His work for us is perfect and sufficient.

What has this divine Savior done? Paul tells us in verses 11-15. First, through Christ, we have been “circumcised with a circumcision made without hands” (v. 11). This is not a physical act but a spiritual reality. In the Old Testament, circumcision was a sign of God's covenant with His people, but it pointed forward to a greater reality: the cleansing of our hearts by Christ. Through faith, we are united with Him, and our sinful nature—the “body of the flesh”—is put off. This happens not by our effort but by the “circumcision of Christ,” His death and resurrection.

Paul continues, explaining that in baptism, we were “buried with him” and “raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God” (v. 12). Baptism is no mere symbol; it is a divine act where God unites us with Christ's death and resurrection. As Luther wrote in the Small Catechism, baptism “works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this.” In baptism, God makes us alive with Christ, forgiving

all our trespasses (v. 13). We were dead in sin, separated from God, but Christ's work on the cross canceled "the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands" (v. 14). Every sin, every failure, every rebellion was nailed to the cross. Jesus paid it all.

And if that weren't enough, Paul proclaims Christ's ultimate victory: "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him" (v. 15). The cross was not a defeat but a triumph. Jesus defeated Satan, sin, and death, stripping the demonic powers of their authority. As Lutherans, we understand that Christ's work is complete. There is nothing left for us to add. Our salvation is secured by His grace alone, through faith alone, as revealed in Scripture alone.

The Warning: Beware of Elemental Spirits

Yet, Paul does not stop with the proclamation of Christ's victory. He issues a warning in verse 8: "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ." What are these "elemental spirits of the world," and why is it so important for us to be aware of them?

In the context of Colossians, the "elemental spirits" (or "elemental principles") likely refer to spiritual forces or teachings that claim authority apart from Christ. In the first century, the Colossians faced pressures from false teachers who blended Jewish legalism, pagan mysticism, and human philosophies. These teachings suggested that salvation required more than Christ—perhaps special rituals, secret knowledge, or adherence to human traditions. Paul calls these "elemental spirits" because they are tied to the fallen world, influenced by demonic forces that seek to undermine the sufficiency of Christ.

To illustrate this danger, let us look to a true moment in church history: the challenge posed by Gnosticism in the early church, particularly in the second century. Gnosticism, a heresy combated by early church fathers like Irenaeus of Lyons, claimed that salvation required secret spiritual knowledge beyond what Christ provided. Gnostics taught that the material world was evil and that only by ascending through spiritual realms, guided by esoteric teachings, could one reach God. They diminished Christ, viewing Him as a lesser spiritual being, not the fully divine Savior. Irenaeus, in his work *Against Heresies* (circa 180 AD), refuted these ideas, emphasizing that Christ is the fullness of God, as Paul declares in Colossians 2:9. Irenaeus pointed to the apostles' teaching, preserved in Scripture, as the true source of salvation, warning that Gnostic teachings were deceptive "elemental spirits" leading people away from Christ. Historical records, including Irenaeus's writings, confirm this struggle, as he defended the sufficiency of Christ against these false philosophies. This example reminds us that the "elemental spirits" are not just ancient threats but any teaching that elevates human wisdom or spiritual experiences above the Gospel.

For us today, the “elemental spirits” take many forms. They appear in philosophies that elevate human reason above God’s Word, suggesting that we can find truth apart from Christ. They manifest in cultural trends that prioritize self-fulfillment, materialism, or moral relativism over the truth of Scripture. They even creep into the church when we add to the Gospel, insisting that salvation depends on our works, our feelings, or our adherence to certain traditions. As conservative Lutherans, we must be vigilant. The devil is crafty, and his lies are subtle. He whispers that Christ’s work is not enough, that we need something more—whether it’s a new spiritual experience, a self-help program, or a cultural ideology.

This warning is critical because these “elemental spirits” lead us away from Christ, the only source of life and salvation. They enslave us to human effort, leaving us anxious and uncertain. But Paul reminds us that in Christ, we have everything we need. He is the head of all rule and authority (v. 10). No philosophy, no spiritual force, no human tradition can add to or surpass what Christ has done.

The Call: Living as Those Rooted in Christ

Because of what Christ has done—forgiving our sins, uniting us with His death and resurrection, and triumphing over evil—Paul calls us to “walk in him” (v. 6). As those who have been made alive in Christ, filled with His fullness, we are called to live in a way that reflects our union with Him. Christ is in us through the Holy Spirit, and we are part of His body, the Church. So, what does He want to see from us?

Rooted and Built Up in Faith: To “walk in him” means to remain grounded in Christ, like a tree with deep roots or a building with a firm foundation. This happens through the means of grace—God’s Word and Sacraments. As Lutherans, we believe that God works through these means to strengthen our faith. Regularly hearing the Word, receiving the Lord’s Supper, and remembering our baptism keep us connected to Christ. They remind us that our salvation is not based on our efforts but on His finished work.

Established in the Faith: Paul urges us to be “established in the faith, just as you were taught” (v. 7). This means clinging to the truth of Scripture, as handed down through the apostles and faithfully taught in the Church. As conservative Lutherans, we hold fast to the confessions of our faith, such as the Book of Concord, which keep us anchored in the truth. In a world of shifting ideologies, we must stand firm, testing every teaching against God’s Word.

Abounding in Thanksgiving: Gratitude flows naturally from a heart filled with Christ. When we grasp the magnitude of what He has done—forgiving our sins, canceling our debt, and defeating our enemies—our response is one of joy and thankfulness. This thanksgiving is not just a feeling but a way of life. It shapes how we worship, how we treat others, and how we face trials. A thankful heart trusts that Christ is enough, no matter the circumstances.

Rejecting False Teachings: Walking in Christ means rejecting the “elemental spirits” that seek to captivate us. The example of Irenaeus and the early church’s fight against Gnosticism shows us the importance of discernment. We must measure every idea, trend, or philosophy against the truth of Christ. This requires humility, knowing that our human reason is flawed and that only God’s Word is infallible. As Luther said, “We must cling to the Word alone, for it is the only thing that abides.”

Living as Forgiven Sinners: Because Christ has canceled our debt, we live in the freedom of forgiveness. This freedom empowers us to love others, to forgive as we have been forgiven, and to serve without fear of condemnation. Our good works—whether in our vocations as parents, workers, or neighbors—are not attempts to earn salvation but the fruit of a life rooted in Christ.

Conclusion: Christ Is Enough

Dear friends, Colossians 2:6-15 is a call to rest in Christ’s sufficiency and to live as those who are united with Him. He has done everything for us: He took on flesh, lived a perfect life, died for our sins, rose in victory, and defeated the powers of darkness. Through baptism and faith, we are made alive in Him, filled with His fullness, and freed from the debt of sin. The early church’s battle against Gnosticism reminds us to beware of “elemental spirits” that would lead us astray, and instead, to cling to Christ alone. Because He is in us and we are in Him, we are called to walk in Him—rooted in His Word, established in His truth, abounding in thanksgiving, and vigilant against the lies of the world.

We, then, trust in Christ alone. We reject the empty deceit of the “elemental spirits” and rest in the One who is the head of all authority. We live as His redeemed people, shining His light in a world that desperately needs His truth, just as Jesus has shined the light of his saving love into our hearts.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.

Pastor Ron Breight

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