

LIVE HIM  
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Colossians 2:6-19 Common English Bible (CEB)

So live in Christ Jesus the Lord in the same way as you received him. Be rooted and built up in him, be established in faith, and overflow with thanksgiving just as you were taught. See to it that nobody enslaves you with philosophy and foolish deception, which conform to human traditions and the way the world thinks and acts rather than Christ. All the fullness of deity lives in Christ's body. And you have been filled by him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not administered by human hands. The circumcision of Christ is realized in the stripping away of the whole self dominated by sin. You were buried with him through baptism and raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead because of the things you had done wrong and because your body wasn't circumcised, God made you alive with Christ and forgave all the things you had done wrong. He destroyed the record of the debt we owed, with its requirements that worked against us. He canceled it by nailing it to the cross. When he disarmed the rulers and authorities, he exposed them to public disgrace by leading them in a triumphal parade.

So don't let anyone judge you about eating or drinking or about a festival, a new moon observance, or sabbaths. These religious practices are only a shadow of what was coming—the body that cast the shadow is Christ. Don't let anyone who wants to practice harsh self-denial and worship angels rob you of the prize. They go into detail about what they have seen in visions and have become unjustifiably arrogant by their selfish way of thinking. They don't stay connected to the head. The head nourishes and supports the whole body through the joints and ligaments, so the body grows with a growth that is from God.

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We continue today with Paul's letter to the Colossians. As a quick review:

- The church in Colossae was started by a man named Epaphras.
- Paul had never met these people before.
- Paul wrote to them to provide encouragement because he'd heard that they were experiencing pressures from Jewish-Christians regarding "proper law following," as well as proponents of other faiths.

- Remember that in Colossae there were people who believed in mysticism and polytheism – it was easy for some to lump Jesus into this group of numerous gods, each governing different arenas of human life.

In my first message on Colossians, Paul began his letter thanking the Colossians. Ensuring they knew their efforts as a young and fledgling congregation were not only recognized but appreciated.

In my message last week, Paul talked to the Colossians about Jesus' divinity; the image of the invisible God; monotheistic - Jesus isn't a copy or a likeness, but a project of the one and only God on the canvas of our humanity and the embodiment of the divine in the world. Paul affirmed what Epaphras had taught them; Jesus is the Messiah and through Jesus' crucifixion, the Colossians' estrangement from God was reconciled. Christ was in them – forever and ever.

Today, we continue with Paul's letter as he now writes reassurances; "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord..." **As you therefore have received....** Paul says,

- the good news was presented to you in its entirety
- you chose to accept it, believe it and commit yourself to you – thank you!
- so now .... **JUST DO IT – YOU'VE GOT THIS**
- stay rooted in the Christ **AND NOW DO**
- remain established in your faith as you have been taught **AND NOW SERVE**

I often see Paul as an English profession demonstrating how to write a basic paper:

- tell them what you're going to say
- say it
- tell them what you said

Paul is virtually repeating himself as he instructs the Colossians in practical and theology religious practices. He understood the pressures they felt from opponents of Jesus' message, who were stirring up questions and doubts.

Practically, Paul reminds them not to get caught up in human traditions like

- circumcision
- refraining from various foods or drink: pork, caffeine
- asceticism (extreme and harsh self-denial)
- sabbaths or festivals
- creeds or prayers; the Lord's prayer

– such things, done repetitiously, mechanically and mindlessly, without Christ at the center, end up taking away from the grace of God.

Theologically, Paul instructs them to not be swayed, guilted, or pressured into worshipping

angels or other deities which distract from the head of the body and of the church, Jesus Christ. Again, keep your focus on Jesus as head of the church and God will respond, guide and support you.

I think the translation of this passage in **the Message** really helps us in a modern context, “Watch out for people who try to dazzle you with big words and intellectual double-talk. They want to drag you off into endless arguments that never amount to anything. They spread their ideas through the empty traditions of human beings and the empty superstitions of spirit beings. But that’s not the way of Christ. Everything of God gets expressed in him, so you can see and hear him clearly. You don’t need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ, and the emptiness of the universe without him. When you come to him, that fullness comes together for you, too. His power extends over everything.”

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As for big words and intellectual double-talk, I want to share with you a reading:

“[Humans] experience themselves as having a world to which [they] belong. The basic ontological structure is derived from an analysis of this complex dialectical relationship” (Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, pg. 169). “These [ontological elements] constitute the basic structure of being...Three outstanding pairs of elements constitute the basic ontological structure: individuality and universality, dynamics and form, freedom and destiny. In these three elements the first expresses the self-relatedness of being, its power of being something for itself, while the second element expresses the belongingness of being, its character of being a part of a universe of being (Vol. 1, pg. 165).

What on earth did I just say? I studied this in seminary and I’m still not entirely sure. This is a quote from Paul Tillich’s, Systematic Theology, Volume 1.

In seminary, it’s typical for a student to take at least one course in “systematic theology.” Systematic theology is a discipline that formulates an orderly, rational and coherent account of the doctrines of the Christian faith. Sounds simple enough, right? You take all the sacred Christian texts (the books of the Bible and the Apocrypha), consider church history and texts written about those sacred Christian texts and try to make a systematized statement of what the whole Bible says.

So, what did Tillich say? Well, after a whole quarter of intense reading and studying, I learned that in that passage he was basically talking about the Trinity and how we try to understand who/what God is and who we are in relation to God.

“Well why didn’t he just say that!” That’s what I said to my professor numerous times during that class. The way that Tillich wrote confused me and made me self-conscious about what I thought I knew. It seemed like he was trying to dazzle with big words and intellectual double-talk. Now, I’m not saying that Tillich was purposely trying to confuse me or others. I know that

he was honestly working through how **HE** understood theology in a systematic way. Tillich's systematic theology, once simplified, made a lot of sense to me. But this experience is what I imagine the Colossians were experiencing and what Paul is warning against. When you have people who use big words, try to talk "above you," or perhaps talk in circles, making you feel unsure and doubt yourself, you need to remember to "live in Christ Jesus the Lord in the same way as you receive him."

Unlike the Colossians, we have 2,000 years of church history and writings in response to the Bible to sift through and attempt to comprehend. We are fortunate in that respect, that we have access to SO MANY PERSPECTIVES, INTERPRETATIONS AND COMMENTARIES. But, we must be vigilant and alert of anyone who tries to judge and/or pressure us or anyone into believing that Christ's sacrifice did not fully and completely reconcile us to God. Paul's reassurances are valuable to us, "you received the message. You've taken it to heart. Don't let others "fancy-talk" you about Jesus! You've got this!

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In verses 12-14, Paul said,

<sup>12</sup>You were buried with him through baptism and raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.<sup>13</sup>When you were dead because of the things you had done wrong and because your body wasn't circumcised, God made you alive with Christ and forgave all the things you had done wrong. <sup>14</sup>He destroyed the record of the debt we owed, with its requirements that worked against us. He canceled it by nailing it to the cross.

Richard Eslinger, in *Feasting on the Word*, gave a very profound assessment of this passage. He said,

- 1) There is a deceitful philosophy in the church that says some sins are unforgivable and therefore some people are unforgivable.
- 2) This dangerous philosophy can go on to infect entire communities of faith, even denominations that convince themselves that they are the good and faithful, forgiven people and that the others are bad, unfaithful and perhaps even unforgiven.
- 3) This is a deceitful philosophy because as it says in this passage, God has nailed our transgressions to the cross and God has overcome our worst sins. And it is Christ, not you, or me, or our church, or our denomination that is the head of the church. And it is Christ who calls us and raises us in one body.
- 4) We are reborn in the waters of baptism. The deceitful philosophy that separated us and denied us one another's humanity, lies floating like algae or soap scum on the surface of the water which is left behind by grace.
- 5) Through the grace of God we are raised with Christ; a new and life together in the body.

Paul warned the Colossians of opponents of Christ and false teachers, but Richard Eslinger points out rightly, that this same warning is just as applicable today within our own church, even.

No one, no pastor, no church should ever tell you that anything you've done is unforgiveable. We must even fight the voices in our head that sow the seeds of doubt, telling us we fall short, we are weak or we are unloved. We must resist any notion that there is a hierarchy of sins according to God. We may reason that this sin is worse than that sins, but it's not for us to make that judgement. It's up to God. We must not feel so self-righteous. If we're going to put any value in Paul's words, then hear them again, "God made you alive with Christ and forgave all the things you had (or have) done wrong. God destroyed the record of the debt we owed...by nailing it to the cross."

It really is simple and straight forward; go ahead with what you've been given – Jesus the Christ – you've got this - now **LIVE HIM.**

Amen.