

**GOD'S PROVISION FOR HOLY LIVING**

Colossians 1:11-15

**Intro:** I hope you are continuing to read Paul's letter to the church at Colosse. We don't know that it was a large church by today's standards, but neither do we know that it was a particularly small church. But what we do know was that it was a good church. Spiritually it was very healthy. But Paul wanted it to stay that way. However, Paul knew that false teachers had come to Colosse, and they were spreading their false doctrines. We learn more about them in the latter part of chapter 2.

What false teachers try to do is to make Christians think that they may be right as far as they have gone, but they just haven't gone far enough. They like to make Christians think that they are making a mistake by limiting themselves to the teaching of the Bible. Usually they attack the doctrine of the grace of God, and try to get people to believe that special works are necessary to complete what Christ has done. False teachers who use parts of the Bible, and then add to it, are more dangerous in churches than teachers which come with teaching that is altogether different.

Now, as I have said repeatedly, the best way to detect error is to know the truth, the truth of the Word of God. In NT days it was to know the truth of the prophets of the OT and the teaching of the apostles who were alive and ministering at that time. The people did not have the NT like we do. They gathered together for the congregational reading of epistles like the epistle to the Colossians. I am sure that you have noticed that almost at the end of this epistle, actually chapter 4 and verse 16, Paul, in concluding his letter to them said this:

16 And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea (Col. 4:16).

And when writing his first epistle to Timothy, he said, "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:13). Now if Paul was exhorting Timothy to do this, he surely meant that the people in their meetings should do the same. I can imagine that after the reading of the Scriptures, the pastors, or some other elder, or perhaps an apostle (if one were there) would explain and apply what had been read to them. Their meetings were conducted around the Word of God. That is what we try to do also. The church service needs to be a teaching service. This leads to exhortation and application of the Word of God. The church that

does not teach, leaves the people largely with no defense when false teachers come along.

Now the NT church was built upon “the foundation of the apostles and prophets” as the Apostle Paul told the church at Ephesus. See Ephesians 2:20. Turn back to Ephesians and follow as I read to you the last four verses of chapter 2, and then I will tell you why I want to read it to you. This is what these verses tell us. And remember that Paul was writing to a church that was predominantly Gentile:

- 19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;
- 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;
- 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:
- 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22).

Here Paul was really explaining what the church, the body of Christ, is.

It is build upon “the foundation of the apostles and prophets,” i.e., NT prophets. And Jesus Christ is the Chief Cornerstone. That is, the church is built upon Who Jesus Christ is, and what He has done. We speak of these as the Person and Work of Christ. So it is very important that we know Who the Lord is, and what He came to the earth to do. We are the building, or a part of that building for “an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

Now I want you to notice that all Three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned here.

When we go back to one of the verses we had last week, verse 9 of Colossians 2, we learned that “in Him,” that is, *in Christ*, “in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,” or in His human body – a statement which means that the Lord Jesus did not give up any of His Deity when He became a Man. He was still totally like God, and totally like the Holy Spirit.

Now coming back to Colossians, up to this point in the epistle, that is, up to our text for this morning, Paul has been dealing with Who Jesus Christ is, and what He has done. Remember in chapter 1 verses 13 and 14 He is our Savior. In verse 15 He is the visible image of the invisible God. In

## Colossians #15 (3)

verses 16 and 17 He is not only the Creator, but He is the Sustainer of this whole universe. Ever since creation He has been holding it all together, keeping it functioning for all these years as God originally intended it to function. Then, with respect to the NT church, the resurrected Christ is the Head of the Church. And then Paul stated at the end at the end of verse 18 that in all of these areas it was God's purpose that Christ would have the preeminence. And the point is that in His Person and in His Work all that He did to reveal God, and all that He did for our salvation, is sufficient. He left nothing undone. So all that you want to know about God, can be learned by knowing Christ. And there isn't anything that has to do with our salvation that has not been done by our Lord Jesus Christ. When any teacher tries to teach anything about salvation that does not make Christ, and Christ alone, everything, he is a false teacher. When a teacher tried to go beyond Christ, he is a false teacher.

Remember what Paul wrote in chapter 2, verses 8 through 10, which we had last week. All of the fulness of God dwells in Him, and we are complete in Him. These statements being the truth of God, then don't let anyone tell you anything that they know about God that isn't to be seen in Christ, and don't let anyone tell you about salvation that isn't directly related to Christ, and only to Christ! Is there any way to know God except through Christ? Absolutely not! Did Christ leave anything undone regarding our salvation that you or I or anyone else has to add? Not a single thing.

Now in the verses we have before us this morning the Apostle Paul is going to move ahead in talking about our salvation. And this seems to have been one of the major points of the false teachers who were in Colosse at that time. One of the things they were teaching was that the death of Christ did nothing to keep us from sinning after we are saved. For this we need to be careful about what we eat, and what we drink. We need to observe certain holy days, particularly the Sabbath. Ordinances became the main thing for Christians to be concerned about if they expect to live lives that are pleasing to God. Look at verse 21 of our chapter to see what the false teachers were saying: "Touch not; taste not; handle not."

I am just pointing out some of the things that the false teachers were emphasizing that they said, made up the Christian life. But let me give you the conclusion which Paul came to, and you will see it in verse 23. Now unfortunately the translation of this verse is not as clear as it could

be. What it says is true, but it could be stated in a stronger way. Let me give it to you as it is given in the margin of my Bible. Paul mentioned the various things that the false teachers were emphasizing, and then he said that these things may look good, and appear to be helpful in conquering the demands of our old nature, but the end of verse 23 means and should read that “they are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh.” Paul didn’t say that they might help a little; he said that they were worthless!!!

They were not only of no help, but they were a total waste of time. We are not saved by grace, and then made holy by our own works. We seek to please the Lord because we are saved, and provision has been made in the death of Christ for us to live holy lives. None of us is going to be perfect until we get to heaven, but by the grace of God we need to be moving in that direction.

Now let us go back to verse 11. You will notice that in verse 11 Paul mentioned something that was very, very important to the Jews. He spoke of circumcision. In verse 12 he mentioned what was important to both Jews and Gentiles, and that was baptism. The Jews had their various washings, but the doctrine of baptism was quickly perverted even in the church.

I want you to notice one thing that is true both of verse 11 and verse 12. Paul was not saying that you need to be circumcised, nor that you need to be baptized. On both verses he indicated that they had been circumcised, and that they had been baptized. Look at verse 11 and see if that is not what it says. He said that in Christ they were circumcised. And in verse 12 he does not say that you need to be baptized; he said that they had been buried with Christ in baptism.

Both circumcision and baptism are ceremonies. We could call them rituals. But they both have deep significance regarding the relationship that God’s people have with God. But the problem arises when the ritual or ceremony becomes the important part and the meaning of the ritual is forgotten.

Circumcision preceded the giving of the Law. It is first mentioned in Genesis 17 and was to become a sign to Abraham and to his descendants that God was their God, and that they were His people. In fact, it was to God so important that any man who was not circumcised was to be “cut

off” from the people of God. It was to speak of their relationship to God, and of their love for God, and their desire to do His will. But as time went on it just became a ritual, a ceremony which in the eyes of the Jews elevated them above the Gentiles. The Jews became known as the circumcised, and the Gentiles as uncircumcised. In fact, you will possibly remember that in the early church some of the Jew wanted to make circumcision a condition of salvation. They were telling the Gentiles that “except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). It never meant that, but when the ritual becomes more important than the meaning of the ritual, then heresy is the result. One of the things that the Apostle Paul gloried in before he was saved, was that he had been circumcised on the eighth day. He didn’t know what that meant until he was saved and realized that when he was saved he had a circumcision that was “made without hands” which transformed his life “in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.” I think that the best explanation of that expression, “the circumcision of Christ,” does not mean Christ’s circumcision, but that in the Gospel of Christ the Lord did in his heart what never was accomplished by what was call “the circumcision in the flesh made by hands” (Eph. 2:11). A number of times in the OT we read of those who were uncircumcised in heart, or whose ears were uncircumcised, because they had no place for God in their lives. Even Stephen said to that crowd in Jerusalem to whom he was preaching, said to them,

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51),

The Apostle Paul stated what true circumcision is in Romans 2:28-29:

28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Our text in Colossians 2:11 tells us that we don’t need to seek to be circumcised because we were circumcised by Christ when He by His death for us put off “the body of the sins of the flesh,” thus providing for our victory over sin in our daily lives.

Going on to verse 12 we know that the same problem exists as far as baptism is concerned. Some people believe that you are not full saved until you are baptized in water. I was dealing with a man who professed to be a Christian, but he was having trouble with a particular sin. As I remember it was drinking. And as we talking together he said to me,

“Maybe it would help if I got baptized.” I believe that every true Christian ought to be baptized, but it is not because I believe that baptism will keep us from sinning. Baptism, like circumcision was intended to be, an outward ceremony which was evidence of an inner work. Baptism is just a picture of the kind of baptism that Paul was mentioning here. Water baptism pictures what salvation is – our union with Christ in His death and resurrection. But if you are not saved before you are baptized, baptism won’t save you. Paul was teaching here that our salvation was actually accomplished by the death and resurrection of Christ. When Christ died, in God’s sight I died in Him. And when He was raised, I was raised with Him. He died as my Substitute. My sins were put away by His death, and I have resurrection life because He was raised, and I was raised with Him and in Him.

Salvation is not my doing, but God’s Who raised Christ from the dead. In Christ we have a new life, His life, and it is by the operation of His life in us we are able to live holy lives. But it all goes back to Christ. It goes back, not to what I do for Him, but to what He did for me – and what He continues to do through me as my living Savior. So baptism is not what I do to contribute to my salvation. Christ has already done everything for the forgiveness of my sins, and to enable me by His life in me to live a life where I will be growing in holiness.

What does verse 14 have to do with my salvation? You and I stand condemned before God because we are charged under the Law of God. We are not saved by keeping the Law. It is too late for that. We already stand condemned by the Law, and are under the judgment of God. But the good news is that when Christ died, I died in Him. The wages of sin is death. But because He died for me, or you, He paid the penalty for our sins, and so all charges against us because of our sins, have been paid in full by the death of our dear Savior.

But there is one more point to be made in verse about the completion of our salvation in Christ. And that is brought out in verse 15. “Principalities and powers” speaks of the Satanic forces who introduced sin into the human family, and eternal death as the penalty. “Spoiled” is a great word to describe the victory that Christ won against all of the forces of evil. Our Lord has completely put off all of the forces of evil so that we are no longer slaves of Satan and sin, but delivered forever from the tyranny of Satan and sin.

Now let me ask you a question. Can you think of anything that the Members of the Godhead had overlooked in the salvation we have in Christ? We have had the body of the flesh put off by what our true circumcision is. We have been united with Christ in His death and resurrection so that now we have new life in Christ. All charges against us in the court of heaven have been paid in full, and so the charges against us have been dropped. And the forces of the Evil One have been completely and eternally defeated. How could our salvation possibly be more complete. What could anyone else provide for us what we already have in Christ.

**Concl:** But let me add one more point. In all five of these verses we have considered today, there is not one thing for us to do. God in Christ has done everything for us to secure our eternal salvation. But I want you to note two expressions here that are very important as we face the remainder of this epistle. One is in verse 11 where Paul described the work of our Lord as *a putting off* – a work which our Lord has done. And then in verse 15 the verb “spoiled” could also be translated, *put off*.

*Now if you have been reading Colossians carefully, you have noticed that the Apostle Paul really described the Christian life, a life pleasing to God, a life of holiness, as a life where we are constantly putting off sin (see 3:8) and putting on (see 3:12). And all of this is only because by faith when we trusted in Christ we have done what Paul stated in 3:10 and 11.*

Our justification, our sanctification, and our glorification are all secured for us in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. But as we await the day of our glorification, we need to be putting off the sins which the Lord died to save us from, and putting on those characteristics which will make us more like our Savior – the purpose for which we have been saved.